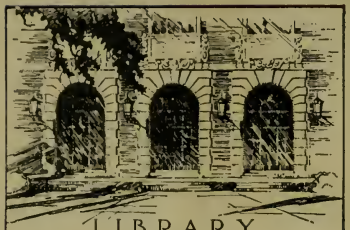

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MRS. ARTHUR.

BY

MRS. OLIPHANT,

AUTHOR OF

"The Chronicles of Carlingford,"

&c. &c.

"Fie, fie! unknit that threat'ning, unkind brow,
And dart not scornful glances from those eyes.
. . . . . .
A woman mov'd is like a fountain troubled."
TAMING OF THE SHREW.

"He breathed a sigh, and toasted Nancy!"
DIBDIN.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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MRS. ARTHUR.

CHAPTER I.

ARTHUR CURTIS did not think of the letter which old Davies had given him till days after. It had been crushed up in the pocket of his coat, the sight of his sister, and all the contending emotions of the time having put it out of his head; and what could there be agreeable in such a communication at such a time? A final sermon to him upon his folly, a final admonition as to all the terrible consequences of his fault—he had, he thought, enough of these, and he had not cared to make himself miserable on his wedding-

day with such a communication. It was not unmixed delight, even without that, though this was not a confession he made to himself, in words, at least. But the sight of his sister's writing half sickened him when he saw it eventually. To be told that the course you are pursuing is ruinous, when you are entirely delighted with that course, is bad enough; but to be told so when the first shock of doubt, the first sharp suspicion of a mistake, has come into your mind, is unendurable. Arthur had not, it may be supposed, allowed to himself that this was already the state of affairs within a few days after his marriage. He was the "happiest of men;" the society of his bride was sweet to him, and her tenderness gave him an exquisite, indescribable, all-penetrating delight, notwithstanding everything. Is the sudden shock of that absolute identification of two different people, the one with the other, ever for the first moment, a happiness unmingled? It was not, at least,

to Arthur. And Nancy was not one of those compliant, sweet-tempered women who swamp their own habits and ways in those of their husbands. Arthur had known these habits intimately enough; but the changed relationship brought such an entire change of aspect as was astonishing to himself. Heretofore he had been able to admire as piquant, or to laugh at as amusing, the roughnesses or simplicities of a breeding so different from his own; but suddenly an entire difference had come upon his feelings. Now that he was responsible for these peculiarities, they became alarming to him; he saw them with the eyes of other people, of his mother, his sister, of Durant even, who would wonder and be horrified to see Arthur's wife so conducting herself. She was no longer Nancy Bates, the girl for whom he was willing to risk the world—but a part of himself, in whom his own character, his own very being, was involved. This made the strangest differ-

ence in everything. He had already felt it beginning for some time, but it was in full force from the moment which changed the tax-collector's daughter into his wife. Thus he had felt, not amused, but irritated, when she made her appearance in that salmon-coloured "silk." That Mrs. Bates's daughter should wear the one fine and glistening garment she possessed to do honour to her bridegroom, and to dazzle the eyes of all beholders on her wedding-day, would there not have been in this a certain appropriateness in the midst of the inappropriateness, a *sancta simplicitas* which would have charmed him? But it became all at once much more apparent to Arthur that his wife ought to know better than to set out on a journey in a pink silk gown; though when he tried by all manner of deceptive arguments to beguile her into the choice of a more suitable dress, representing that the dark blue serge or dark brown merino in the shops would be warmer, more easy and comfortable, less

liable to be spoiled, and every other false yet true reason for preferring it that he could think of, Nancy remained unconvinced.

"You shan't make a dowdy of me, Arthur, I can tell you," she said. "I didn't get married to go about the world in these poor sort of clothes, like a dressmaker's girl; and to France, where everybody dresses so well!"

This was during the two or three days they stayed in London on purpose, if the truth had been told, to get a suitable outfit for her; but only Arthur, not Nancy, was aware of this true motive for the delay.

"My dear girl, if they dress well it is by having suitable dresses for everything, not by being fine," said Arthur, driven to his wit's end.

"Fine! you mean that I am dressed up," cried Nancy, her colour rising, "and that is hard, for it was all done to please you; I thought you would like to see me fine. I never used to mind

what clothes I wore; but I—and mamma too—tried to make as good a show as ever we could, for your sake!"

What could Arthur do but protest that he loved her more, if that were possible, for the pains she had taken to please him, and thought the salmon-coloured dress lovely; but after a while he returned to the charge. "In France," he said with the air of an authority, "they are great on having a dress for every different occasion. Their dresses for the morning they never wear in the evening, and their travelling dresses—"

"But goodness me!" cried Nancy, "what an extravagant way of going on! It may be all very well for duchesses and grand ladies; but that would never do for a poor girl like me."

"You forget you are not a girl at all, much less a poor one," he said, pursuing his wiles, "but a married lady, my Nancy." Goodness me is not a pretty oath; he swallowed it however, not daring

to attempt correction, with a secret grimace.

"Yes, that is all very well," she repeated, "but all the same we are poor enough. I shan't be a bit richer than I was. I may be grander, I don't know; for your folks have cast you off, Arthur, you mustn't forget that."

"Oh! my *folks!*" cried the unhappy one under his breath; the word hurt him, in spite of himself. He had not been so delicate once; but this was like a dig in the ribs to Arthur. It made him cry out, though he stifled the cry.

"No, I don't think much of what you say if that is French fashion," said Nancy, "English fashion is far better. Instead of fussing and changing all day long, and wasting one's time, it is so convenient just to pin in a bit of lace and double back the fronts, and there you have a lovely dress for the evening; that's what I like. No need to go and unpack one's boxes and get out another dress, it's done

in a moment. You must allow, Arthur, that English fashion is best for that."

Poor Arthur! he thought of his sister's little simple toilettes, so fresh, so crisp, so plain! and he did not know—what foolish young man ever does know? that whereas the finery is an easy matter, these dainty sobrieties of garb are the highest quintessence of art. In novels, which are the chief exponents of young women to young men, and of young men to young women, has not the captivating humble bride always a spotless collar and cuffs ready for every emergency, which make her exquisite on all occasions? Why had not Nancy the secret of that little collar and snowy cuff?

All this, however, is a digression from the letter which he found in his pocket, having thrust it away there on his wedding morning. He tore it open impatiently after this talk. Did not he know very well what must be in it? But it was better to glance at it and be done

with it at once. He found it, however, something so very unlike what he supposed, that the little letter completely unmanned him and took his strength away. He read it first with so much surprise that he could scarcely comprehend its meaning, and when he had fully mastered it, burst out into an abrupt break of sound of the most unintelligible description.

"What is the matter?" cried Nancy; she was half frightened. She came to the door of the inner room in which she was, and looked out upon him, half dressed, wrapped in the shawl Matilda had lent her. "Are you laughing or crying?" Perhaps it had been a little of both; but at all events it had left the tears in his eyes.

"Look here," he said, with an unsteady voice, "this is the letter old Davies gave me on Tuesday;" and then he added in a lower tone, "God forgive me, I don't deserve it," with a half sob.

Very coldly Nancy took the letter. She

knew by instinct what it must be. It was written in a rather illegible but pretty handwriting, not at all like, but somehow superior she felt to the pointed precision of her own.

"I am going to your wedding to-morrow, Arthur dear; not to see you, but to be there, that there may be some one that loves you all the same. That always goes without saying. We think that you may not have money enough to do all you want, so we have just been to the bank to get this. Dear, dear Arthur, God bless you! Mamma shakes her head, but she says it all the same.

"LUCY."

And then there was added in another hand.

"Surely I say it, surely I must say it always. And God forgive you, oh, my cruel boy."

Nancy puzzled over this for some time.

She began to read it aloud and read it wrong, so that it took a ridiculous sound; then laughed; while Arthur made a furious step towards her to seize it out of her hand. She grew serious then, which quickened her wits and made her finish her reading in silence. When she had done so she flung it to him, letting the two notes enclosed flutter to the ground, and without a word turned round and shut the door violently in his face. He caught the letter; but the two fifty pound notes lay between him and the door, crumpled by Nancy's angry fingers. He stood petrified for the moment, too much surprised to be either hurt or angry. Was this the way in which his wife received his first appeal to her sympathy? the first mention of those who, Arthur suddenly remembered, were next to herself the dearest to him in the world? Somehow he had forgotten this until now; but it suddenly gleamed upon him, a kind of revelation. Certainly it was so; his

mother and sister, were they not his dearest friends, the most generous and kind? Was it possible that his wife could read this letter and not be touched? and yet she had tossed it at him, had crumpled up the notes like waste paper. Was this the attitude she meant to adopt towards his family? and he had been so tolerant of hers!

Nancy did not say a word on the subject when they met again. She looked as if she had been crying; but said nothing, plunging into some indifferent subject with unusual interest. But it was not reasonable that the husband of three days could bear the matter like this. He said something about "my sister's letter," as soon as he had a chance. "We shall have a little more money to spend now, thanks to my mother's thoughtfulness," he said.

"Oh, your mother!" she flung away from him, flushing crimson—a colour that meant anger as he already knew.

"Yes, my mother," he said, "why

should not I speak of my mother? I never think it strange, Nancy, that you should think of yours."

"Mine!" she cried, turning back upon him with flashing eyes, "her thoughts have been as much for you as for me. She has been as kind to you as to me," (this set Arthur thinking; but what could he answer to it?) "but there is not a word of me in all that letter, not a word, though they knew I should be your wife when you got it."

"What could they say? They did not know you, darling, and I had been silly, I had not written to conciliate as I ought to have done; but to defy them. What could they say?"

"Say! it is just as good as if they had said, 'She is no more to us than the dirt under our feet.' They could not do anything against me or say anything against me, so they treat me as if I was not worthy to be noticed; oh, that is what they mean! they think if they keep

that up they will bring you back to them again, and persuade you that I am not worth thinking of. Oh, I know women's ways!"

"You are mistaken, Nancy, I am sure you are entirely mistaken."

"A great deal you can tell! they will not show you what they are after. They will smooth you down and keep you not suspicious. Oh! I tell you I know women's ways."

"You don't know my mother and Lucy," he said, making an effort to stand against her, "they are not like the women you—"

"Not like the women I know? I knew you would come to that," she said violently. "Oh, I knew it the very moment I set eyes upon her; but not yet, not so soon as this." And Nancy, really wounded in her blaze of unnecessary wrath, burst into fiery tears. They were tears that might have been red hot, and scalded as they poured down in a very

thunder shower. He had never seen such a torrent, and he stood thunderstruck; not melted as he had been before, when Nancy was moved in this way. Here too was a change. He stood still, he did not rush to her, and use all the blandishments he could think of to put a stop to the intolerable spectacle of her distress. He let her cry. He was confounded by the sudden outburst; and a sharp twinge of shame for her mingled with the pain she gave him. He was ashamed that *his wife* should be so unjust, so hasty in her judgment, so violent in her mistaken ideas. When he did go to her it was slowly, with a hesitation very different from the lover's rush. That she should be so foolish *now*, was not that something derogatory to him?

"Nancy," he said, "I cannot think how you can be so—unkind. Do you think I mean any offence to you, or that *they* mean any offence? Of course you know they wanted me to marry some

one—better off; some one they knew."

"Oh, let me go," she cried, choking with pain and rage together, "I will go back to my mother; and you can go to yours, of whom you think so much. What does it matter about a common girl like me!"

"I think you are trying to drive me mad," he said, "have I ever wavered between you and my mother? but I see now where I did wrong; I should have gone to her and made a friend of her, instead of defying her. I should have taken you to her—"

"Taken me!" she jumped up and faced him, trembling with agitation and fury, "taken *me!* am *I* to be dragged about to people that don't want me, to people that dare to despise me?"

"Nancy!"

"Nancy! that's all you can call me now. I used to be your love and your darling; now we're married, and I'm bound and can't get free, and you call me Nancy!

Oh! if it was all to do again, and I knew what I know now!"

"What on earth do you know now that you did not know a week ago?" he cried with an impatience beyond words; and yet he felt half inclined to laugh. That the impassioned creature who stood defying him, blazing in impulsive wrath, should resent the absence of those loves and darlings and tender words with which he had hitherto caressed her ears, so hotly as to desire to break every bond between them, struck him with a sudden sense of the absurdity of their quarrel. He went suddenly up to her and took her into his arms. "But you *are* my darling," he said, "all the same; though you are the most unreasonable, the most quick-tempered, the most provoking. Sweet! what is everybody in the world to me compared with you?"

Thus the first quarrel terminated, though not without considerably more trouble. Nancy perhaps saw too the

foolishness of this impossible struggle, and yielded after a certain amount of flattery, coaxing, and caresses. And the cloud blew over so completely that, much to his surprise he found himself able to persuade this despairing bride next morning to get the travelling dress he wished her to have, and to tone herself down generally, and make herself warm and comfortable and less fine. They crossed the Channel two days after, more lovers than ever; but no longer publishing their recent nuptials in their appearance, with Nancy's "silk" carefully packed at the bottom of her box, and herself in a dark blue gown and little plumed hat, looking more like Mrs. Arthur Curtis than Nancy Bates had ever done before. Arthur's heart beat high with pride and pleasure as they watched the white cliffs disappearing. Nancy not without a little natural sentiment, for she had never been out of England before, and it seemed a great thing to her to be out of her own country,

and on the verge of a "foreign land." But fortunately the passage was a very good one, so that no less elevated feeling mingled with these tender regrets. He had her in his own hands now, the bridegroom said to himself; all her antecedents left behind, the home and relations happily got rid of, and all the influences of her new life around her to wean her from the past. And how tractable she had shown herself already, how willing to be convinced! a tender creature, who accepted his dictation sweetly two minutes after she had burst forth in rebellion against him; who had been indignant at his sister's letter (and it was, Arthur allowed to himself, nasty of Lucy, rather like a spiteful girl after all as Nancy said, not to mention her in that little note which was intended to be so gentle and peace-making), and then had forgiven it so frankly as to use part of the money that Lucy sent. This unreasonable, inconsistent, foolish, generous,

hot-headed, soft-hearted darling, could any man desire better than to have her wholly to himself to guide her wayward feet into the print of wifely, womanly ways? The mean little house, the poor form of existence at Underhayes (ungrateful young man! it had seemed an idyllic life, full of noble simplicity and poetry, when he knew her first) lay far behind, and while the probation lasted it would seem so natural that England itself should fade out of sight, and all that was past be forgotten; until by and by he should take his bride home a lady in every outward sign, as she was, he assured himself in heart. It is so easy in a young man's glowing fancy to work this change. Likewise it is very quickly done in many novels, and with wonderful facility and completeness; and, as has been said, where but from novels was Arthur to have acquired any experience in the treatment of cases like his own? All went well during that journey. It was a beautiful

day of the early winter; warmly soft as November can sometimes be, by way of contrast to its ordinary miseries, the sea and the sky alike blue; and if the wind was cold, what there was of it, the sun shining so warmly as to neutralize the wind. And Nancy now at least was well defended and need fear no chill. Her cheeks glowed with the fresh breeze, her little outcries, half of alarm half of exhilaration, when the steamboat gave a small pitch which hurt nobody, delighted Arthur. She clung to him and steadied herself by him with both hands clasped on his arm, and had no thought, now that her moment of sentiment was over, of anything but the excitement of this novel world into which she was hastening. All the clouds that had been upon their horizon seemed to float away.

"I have been thinking," she said, when they got into the railway-carriage on the other side, and Nancy had got over her first amused wonder and bewilderment,

"to hear everybody talking and not to understand a word." They had a carriage to themselves, though that is not so easy to manage on the other side, and Arthur, delighted with his task, had begun to teach her little phrases in the tongue, which notwithstanding her much-talked-of previous studies was quite an unknown tongue to Nancy. "I have been thinking—"

"What is it? Something very grave indeed, judging from that serious face."

"Yes; something very important. I have always wished it, but they would never give in to me. Not that mamma did not think me quite right, but it is very difficult to break a habit in a family. But you must do it, Arthur; it is not such a very old habit with you."

"What is this great thing I am to do—give up smoking—take off my moustache?"

"Oh! no!" cried Nancy, horrified. "The nicest thing about you!" which pleased Arthur much, for it was still new

enough to give him unfeigned and honest pride. "But I will tell you what it is. Nancy is so vulgar, so common, not a name for a lady; and it will not sound well here, abroad, where people have such pretty names. Call me Anna—I have always wished it. I was christened Anna Frances, you know."

"And I could not think who she was when they married me to her," cried Arthur. "I will call you what you like, my darling; but I like Nancy best."

Did ever young people start on a honeymoon expedition with a better understanding? He planned a hundred places to take her to, and things to do. The theatre every night!—How Nancy's eyes sparkled! and the Louvre, of which she was quite willing to admit that it must be very fine, without knowing what it was; and the Tuileries gardens with the band playing, and the beautiful shops in the Boulevards. Even to hear of these delights was enough to charm any bride.

They were to go everywhere, to see everything, to walk about and drive about always these two together—nobody to interfere with them; and the play every night! What could any bride desire more?

CHAPTER II.

PARIS, with all its lamps and shop-windows, dazzled Nancy. It was before the days in which ruins were visible from that brilliant Rue de Rivoli, through which they drove to their hotel. She thought it was an illumination as she saw the sweeping circles of light in the Place de la Concorde, and the long line of lamps under the archways, and could not be persuaded that this was how the brightest of cities adorned herself every night. And when she opened her eyes next morning to the brilliancy of the winter sunshine, and saw the brightness and gaiety of everything around, Nancy

was fairly transported out of herself. She had never even been in a great hotel before, for Arthur had taken her to London lodgings he had been in the habit of using, in Jermyn Street, which were not dazzling. But here everything was lovely, Nancy thought. They had a little *appartement* in one of the great hotels over-looking the garden of the Tuileries, with a little balcony; and from the white carpet with its bouquet, and the sparkling wood-fire which was so bright and clean, and supplemented the sunshine so delightfully, to the mirrors and gilding, and white panels of the walls, everything she looked upon filled Nancy with a bewildering delicious sense of having arrived at the summit of fineness and splendour, and being a lady indeed, a princess almost, enshrined in a bower of bliss. Nothing she had ever seen in all her limited experience was half so splendid; and the noiseless waiters who ran up and down with every luxury that Arthur could

think of, and the dainty food, and the perpetual service bewildered her unaccustomed brain. This then was how great people lived! with carpets like velvet, sofas covered with satin, a host of eager servants to find out what they wanted, and bring them everything that could be thought of; mirrors to reflect them on every side (Nancy had never been so sure about the *sit* of her dress, or knew so well what her figure was like before—and it was a very pretty figure). No wonder they were happy! When they had breakfasted, a pretty Victoria, with a fur rug to cover their knees, came to the door, and in this they drove all about, taking what Arthur called a general view of Paris, its pretty streets, its river and quays, its boulevards, the Champs Elysées, brilliant in the sunshine, with the great arch at the end. When Arthur stopped to let her see Notre Dame, Nancy was respectful, but failed a little in interest. It chilled her to go into a church in the

middle of a week day so soon after she was married. Church was for Sundays, she felt, not a place to go into in the midst of laughing and talk. She felt it like a *memento mori*, a sudden chill upon her exhilaration, and supposed that Arthur took her there with the intention of making her remember her duty and her "latter end," which was a suggestion she did not like.

"Now you shall see something quite different in the ecclesiastical way," he said, stopping at another church before they went back to their hotel; for he felt that somehow, though he did not quite know how, Notre Dame had not been successful with Nancy. But she altogether refused to go into the Madeleine.

"I don't know why you are so anxious that I should see the churches," she said, pouting. "I never knew you were so religious." Arthur made haste to dis avow the imputation, as may be supposed, which all the same he did not like her to

make. He was not "so religious," but he did not like to hear women speak of the matter so—it was "bad taste."

"It is because the building is supposed to be fine," he said, standing at the door of the little carriage to hand her out; but Nancy declined firmly. If she could not think of her duty without being taken into a lot of churches to be reminded of religion and of dying, and all that sort of thing, she did not feel at all disposed to be instructed so—and they came in from their drive a little silent, and not so delighted with each other, and with everything about them as they had been when they went out, though Arthur, for his part, had not the slightest idea why.

Luncheon, however, obliterated all recollection of the churches, and made her again feel that everything was delightful in her present lot. Not that Nancy was *gourmande*, or given to dwell upon what she ate. One of those horrible luxuries, know in England as a Bath bun, would

have contented her, so far as eatables went, quite as well as the daintiest little *fricandeau*. It was the accessories of the meal which told upon her, the obsequious attendants, the perpetual service, the silver dishes, the beautiful fruit on the table, and the sparkling wine, which she had heard the name of all her life, as the crown of luxury, but had never tasted it even in its cheapest form. They must be spending heaps of money, Nancy felt, to live like this. But she was not bold enough to interfere just then, and there was an unexpressed and subtle flattery in Arthur's care to treat her as, she thought, only princesses, who were not brides, would be treated. As a bride, Nancy knew she had a prescriptive right to everything that was fine. Even in her own knowledge, sacrifices were made to secure everything that was better than usual, for the brief but exquisite moment in which a girl held this official position. A bride had a right to a drive in a cab if

she wished it—to a glass of wine if she liked it—to cakes and dainties, and a great deal of coaxing and admiration. And to wear her best dress when she went out, even though it should be on a a week-day. Arthur gave to his bride a glorified version of all these delights, except the last, the pretty Victoria instead of a Hansom, and this expedition to France and other unknown regions, instead of the day at the Crystal Palace, which Mr. Raisins would most likely suggest to Sarah Jane; though it was strange that he should object to her "silk," the only thing of which she had been perfectly sure that it was right. It was in this point of view that she liked the dainty luncheon; and when they went out again arm-in-arm in the afternoon for a walk, the shops on the Boulevards threw her into an ecstasy. Arthur was complaisance itself to all her wishes here. He was willing to stand at the windows and look in as long as she pleased, and

he took her here and there to glove-shops and milliners, and bought her a hundred pretty trifles. In every shop they entered, both men and women were so eager to know what pleased *Madame*, so anxious to prove triumphantly that this thing and the other was becoming to Madame, so openly admiring, so caressingly urgent, that Nancy's head was turned. It seemed impossible not to believe in the sudden enthusiasm she called forth. Could it be only the ribbons, or collars, or gloves they bought that stimulated these delightful people into such warm and apparent admiration. No! Nancy could not entertain such an unworthy thought. It was their kindness, she said to herself, and something still more agreeable whispered in her heart that it was her own attractions that made these people so kind. Had they not a real pleasure in seeing a young bride like herself, so fair, so happy, making everything look well that was put upon her? Nancy did not flatter herself in

this open way, but she had a pleased and delightful conviction that this was the feeling in their minds. She believed in their sincerity, and that she had made a real impression upon them. Was not this how all the *nice* people in books, small and great, showed their appreciation of the lovely young heroine? Nancy had not as yet any experience of the great—and indeed it was an effort on her part to keep up in her mind a certainty that she herself was in a superior position to the masters and mistresses, the "young ladies" and "young gentlemen" in these very fine shops; a little while ago she would have looked up to *them;* now this consciousness made her head turn round, and gave the most curious piquancy to their admiration and enthusiasm for Madame.

"How funny it is," she said, as they came out into the crowded Boulevard, where the lamps were beginning to be lit, "to be called Madamm!"

Arthur looked a little strange at this pronunciation; but he did not venture to criticise. It was necessary to go very quietly with this touchy young woman. He told her some pretty things that Monsieur in the shop had said to him while his wife had been fitting on her wares upon Nancy.

"If you make as much sensation at the theatre," he said, "what shall I do? I am nobody now. I am Madame's attendant, her obsequious husband."

"Don't talk nonsense," said Nancy, radiant. "What funny people the French are! Are they always paying compliments?"

"To people who have any right to them, yes; to pretty people, and those who pay well, and those who will be likely to believe them."

"Arthur, how unkind of you! I don't believe that people are so barefaced, saying things they do not mean. One must

have a very bad opinion of other people if one thinks that."

But for her own part, Nancy was not tempted to think so. She conceived a very high opinion of the French nation. If she could have got Arthur out of the way, she thought she would have liked to try a little conversation on her own account, for it would be delightful to be able to chatter as Arthur did, and talk to anyone; but in his presence she did not like to venture. Once more they went back to their hotel in the most delightful state of content with each other and all the world. They were to dine early, and then go to the "Français" to see the *Bourgeois Gentilhomme*. Arthur had told her the story of the play, and how she would be sure to like it, and that there was not a better French actor living, and not such a good English one; all which had impressed Nancy. And she was to be allowed to wear her pink dress, with a pretty wrap which he had bought, an

Algerian mantle, softly white, with threads of gold, and a flower in her hair. Nancy's heart beat with the thought of all this gaiety and grandeur. He had bought her also a pretty fan; and they were to have a box, which was a thing which conveyed very magnificent ideas to her mind. To sit there throned like a young princess, and allow herself to be admired while the best of actors did his best to amuse her, in the midst of that which imagination had always painted to her as, after a ball, the most seductive of pleasures, a gaily lighted and brilliant theatre, what could be more delightful? And at first Nancy was quite as happy as she expected to be. When she looked out from the corner of the box with its silken curtains upon the bright, many-coloured crowd, it seemed to her as if she could understand a little how the Queen must feel when she came forward to thank her loyal subjects for their kind reception of her. Half of the people seemed to be looking up admiringly,

wonderingly. She had never felt so truly great before. How well she remembered, in the days of her humility, when the highest she could hope for was the upper boxes, watching beautiful ladies come into their box, and giving a careless, splendid look over the rustling company below before they sat down. And now it was she who was the beautiful lady in the box. Was there, perhaps, some poor girl somewhere like Nancy Bates, looking at the lovely new-comer, surveying and envying her with a wistful gaze in all her finery, watching her look down upon the crowd, then sink gracefully into her chair as Nancy did, half retired behind the curtain? It seemed to her that she was two people, herself in the box—Mrs. Arthur Curtis—and Nancy Bates watching from her inferior place; and this doubled the enjoyment in the most wonderful way. How she would have noticed everything, the beautiful white mantle with its gold threads, the flower in the lady's hair, her

dress, and everything about her! and with great, yet less absorbing interest, the handsome young husband who completed her belongings, and was so "devoted" to her. Nancy would scarcely have had eyes for the play in her admiration of the beautiful lady; and now she was the beautiful lady herself, in full possession of all the greatness a box at the play could bestow! How wonderful it was, and delightful; but yet, perhaps, not altogether so delightful and wonderful as it had seemed to Nancy in the pit.

But when the curtain rose, Nancy was not so sure that it was delightful. She was not sufficiently at her ease to enter into even the frank fun of the *Bourgeois Gentilhomme*. She stared at M. Got with wondering curiosity and doubt. No doubt it must be very amusing, for everybody laughed, and so did Arthur; but Nancy could not laugh. What did that queer man on the stage mean by all those strange antics of his?—trying on his clothes

in public, fencing with his maid-servant, making his mouth into round O's, when the still funnier man in the witch-like black hat directed him to do so. It was all strange to her. She puzzled over him, and could not make him out. "What is he saying?" she whispered to Arthur when there was a wilder laugh than usual; but before she could understand what Arthur whispered back, laughing, there was another burst of amusement, and she was thrown out again. At first the sensation was only disappointment, but by and by it became irritation. She could not bear to feel herself the only one who did not know. High up in the gallery above her, she could see a little French girl in a cap, who was enjoying it with all her heart. And Arthur, though he tried to explain all the jokes, forgot now and then, and gave himself up to the fun too, and never thought of her sitting there who did not know what it meant, and could not possibly enjoy it. The doubtful smile which

she kept on her face for the first scene or two, gave way to a fixed and somewhat sullen stare. She fixed her eyes obstinately on the stage, and gazed at the fun with unsympathising face, blank and immovable. If M. Got had seen her, she would have been like a beautiful nightmare to him; and as a matter of fact, that inimitable actor played all his pranks before Nancy without conveying a single humorous idea to her mind, or one smile to her face. How weary, how angry, how dull and miserable she grew while the house rang with laughter, and all that fun went on under her eyes, now sore with staring! All this time the little French girl in the cap, up above, a poor little girl, not at all equal even to Nancy Bates, laughed till the tears came to her eyes; and Arthur laughed, untiring, too, though sometimes wondering a little why Nancy should be so quiet, and stealing anxious looks at her, which she would not respond to, but kept her eyes riveted on the stage. When the

curtain fell, she gave a sigh of relief, but turned her back upon Arthur, and would not answer his questions as to how she had enjoyed it. Enjoyed it! How could he ask her, he who had done nothing but laugh, and never cared for her. When he rose, she rose too, but repulsed his attempts to wrap her cloak more closely round her.

"It will do very well as it is," she said, twitching it out of his hand.

"What is the matter?" he asked, wistfully, drawing her arm through his, not without a little resistance on her part.

"The matter? What should be the matter? I am only tired, and I shall be glad to get home," said Nancy.

"I have made you do too much. I have dragged you about and worn you out, my poor darling!" cried Arthur, and he was full of compunctions, half carrying her downstairs. But when they got into the little *coupé* which waited for them, she burst forth.

"I can't see what there was so very amusing. I don't think it could be good French," cried Nancy. "I don't pretend that I can talk like you, but I learned French at school, and I am sure I could understand if it was good. You call that acting! I did not think he was clever at all."

"My love," said poor Arthur, "it was the great Got, the best comic actor in the world, I think. I never saw anyone like him."

"I have seen a dozen better," cried Nancy. "What did he do? nothing but make a fool of himself, putting on those ridiculous clothes, and dancing and singing, and learning lessons, an old man! The great Go! I wished he would go, I am sure, long before he did go," she said, recovering her spirits a little by means of her pun. But the process was not so successful in respect to Arthur. He did not say anything, but shrugged his shoulders, which fortunately she did not perceive.

"I see," he said, at last. "That is not the kind of acting you care for; the higher walks perhaps would please you better. We will try something quite different to-morrow."

"Oh, to-morrow!" she said, with a little shiver. This delight of the play had already exploded for Nancy; and she recollected with dismay that they had agreed to go to a play *every night!* Was this how her life was to be spent? She thought regretfully of her mother and sisters sitting round the table, chatting about everything that had happened, and everything that was going to happen. The parlour was dingy, and she had thought of it with a wondering recoil of half disgust in comparison with her *appartement*, and all its coquetries, its white carpets and curtains; but she had never been so tired, so worn with trying to be happy at home. The little wood fire, however, was burning brightly, and the wax-candles lighted, and the pretty

sitting-room looked very comfortable when they got back to the hotel, which they began to call "home," with easy desecration of that word upon which the English pride themselves. Arthur put her into a comfortable chair, and made her take some wine, and petted and consoled her. Poor Arthur, he was disappointed too, but he concealed it manfully. His character was developing in this unexpected probation, he was growing patient, forbearing, ready to make all sorts of compromises and sacrifices, to ensure that his young wife should be happy. He had not been so good or so forbearing in his former relationships, when everything had been done to please him; but in marriage, if one will not be accommodating, why the other must, there is no changing that necessity of nature. This union which had cost so much must not turn out a failure. If she would not exert herself, he must. Therefore he swallowed his disappointment in respect

to the immediate evening, and in respect to the narrowing of future resources, which, if Nancy could not be made to like the theatre, would be very serious, and also the deeper disappointment, which he scarcely allowed himself to look at, of finding in Nancy less understanding than he thought. He sat over the fire a little when she had gone to bed and pondered it all. After all, perhaps, it was not unnatural that a young girl who had no experience, and did not understand French, should not all at once appreciate Molière, even when interpreted by Got. Was it to be expected, was it likely? Arthur began to say to himself that his disappointment was the fault of his exaggerated expectations, and that he had been very foolish; poor Nancy, what an ordeal he had subjected her to! But he would not be discouraged, he would try again. Something romantic and sensational at the Porte St. Martin, or a sentimental comedy, such as was running at the Gymnase would do better. He

would try that, something that would interest her. Arthur knew a good deal about the theatres, and he felt sure that one or the other would supply what was wanted. But there was a vague depression in his mind, notwithstanding the bright fire and the white carpets which were so warm and soft. This first effort had not been a success. Nancy had not responded to his call; it was, he supposed, his fault, but it was depressing. There was nothing injurious to Nancy in the comparison that suggested itself. He thought involuntarily of Lucy, how she would have laughed at Got's acting, how lightly she would have come in and sat with him over the fire, and talked it all over, and enjoyed it a second time. All that this proved was the advantages of education—it proved nothing more—and he did not want to change Nancy for Lucy, or to abandon the ventures of this strange and alarming double existence, which, having once begun for him,

could never end except by death. The little failures, the continual perils of opposition and resistance, excited at least, if they did not delight him. Life was no longer tame and monotonous whatever else might be said.

CHAPTER III.

NEXT day Arthur made a further experiment with his bride. It was one of the things he had promised her when they talked of Paris, and it had not occurred to him that the very name of the Louvre conveyed no idea to Nancy's mind. She had been quite willing to accept it as something vaguely splendid which she was to see, but that was all. He took her across the broad sunshiny courts with a little thrill of expectation, chiefly pleasurable, yet with a touch of doubt in it which perhaps made it more exciting. Arthur was not himself very learned in art, nor an en-

thusiast about it. He knew what a young man of his breeding could scarcely escape knowing—he knew which were the pictures that everybody admires; he had all his life been accustomed to believe that he admired them, and what with association, what with faith, what with some natural sense of beauty, such as few minds are quite destitute of, he had liked to go and look at them from time to time when he was in the way of it, and had a certain acquaintance with the great galleries in all the places he had visited. He knew the Louvre well enough to know his way about, to be able to lead a neophyte from one great picture to another, and even to have his favourites in the Salon Carré. This does not necessitate a very high appreciation of art, or much real acquaintance with its productions; but yet it was as the highest knowledge and the wildest furore in comparison with the absolute ignorance and indifference which exists in the class from

which Nancy was taken. A less intelligent girl than Nancy, proceeding from the slightly elevated social position at which it has become known that pictures are things to be admired, and that admiration of them is a proof of superiority both in rank and intellect, would have known how to acquit herself in such an emergency. She would have gone through these galleries with a gush of indiscriminate delight, finding everything beautiful, or at the worst would have taken her cue from her husband, and admired what he he admired. But Nancy had not been educated even up to this point. She knew nothing about them, had never heard of Raffaelle or Murillo, and when Arthur said, "This is the famous Assumption," stared blankly, never having heard of it before; then turned her eyes up and down, gazing about her with that idea that one thing is as good as another, which is the very essence of ignorance. She had not even knowledge enough to

be aware that it was becoming to feign an interest.

"What nice rooms to dance in—are they all kept up for nothing but pictures?" she said, in deference to his apparent interest. Nancy did not say stupid pictures, as she had intended; and it is impossible to describe the disappointed feeling, the eager instructiveness of poor Arthur, who felt his own hitherto superficial conviction that every ordinarily well-endowed mind must care for pictures, at once confounded and intensified by the absolute blankness of his bride.

"My dear Nancy, France is more proud of these than of anything she possesses. It is one of the finest collections in the world."

"I suppose they are worth a great deal of money," she said, looking at them calmly, yet with a certain respect founded on this consideration. She was looking up at that divine wall upon which hangs the great Murillo, the Virgin of the

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Garden, and Her of the Veil, the sidelong penetrating fascination of the Gioconda, and many a wonder more; and her calm of incomprehension was almost sublime. Some were "pretty" she thought; but she pulled Arthur's arm a little to go on, not knowing why he should wish to stay so long, and keep looking when she had seen everything. To be sure it was natural enough to respect things which were worth a great deal of money—the big vases, for instance, in the vestibules, of which she had felt that they must be worth a great deal, though they were not pretty. It was difficult to associate the same idea of value with the pictures, yet Nancy supposed nobody would make so much fuss about them but for this.

"Money!" Arthur said, with a little groan, then making the best of it as he was learning to do: "Yes, dear, a great deal of money—and more than money. Any one of them, almost, is worth

more, even in money, than all you and I have in the world."

"What a shame!" cried Nancy, "nasty old things," and she pulled him on a little. Then she stopped for a second before the Leonardo in the corner, and laughed out. "What funny women! what are they sitting in each other's laps for? That is the funniest I have seen yet," she said.

"Hush, Nancy! this is by a very famous painter; but I cannot say I am fond of it," said Arthur, in his didactic vein. "That on the other side is his, too—the Gioconda it is called—I like it better."

"Not I," said Nancy; "isn't she *deep!* I can't bear people with that look in their eyes. She is exactly like Lizzie Brown at home in Underhayes—you remember Lizzie Brown, Arthur? Come on, I am sure we have stayed long enough here."

"As you like," he said, with a sigh;

"but there are some more I should have liked to point out to you—"

"That is pretty," said Nancy, pointing to a bright-coloured copy which one of the many workers in the Salon Carré was making. "Mayn't one look what they are doing? they would paint at home if they didn't want to be seen. Oh, they are *copying*, are they? I am sure that is a great deal prettier than the old thing on the wall. What do they copy for?"

"To sell chiefly," said Arthur, with a certain sullenness in his despair.

"Oh, to sell! I suppose people like to have them to hang in their rooms? how curious! I would much rather have a picture of you."

Now Arthur had been falling into lower and lower depths of despondency up to this moment. He had said to himself that all his efforts were mere failures—that he could do nothing, and must give up the attempt; but now he cheered up quite unaccountably, quite unreasonably.

There was nothing in what she had said to throw a new light upon Nancy's capacity and rehabilitate her in his eyes, yet somehow it did so. A sudden tender compunction for the harsh judgment he had been forming came into his mind, softening and melting him. He felt disposed to beg her pardon on his knees.

"You silly girl," he said, "what do you want with my picture? If it was of you, it might be worth something; but tell me, Nancy, if I were to buy you some of those copies, which would you choose?"

"I don't want one; you are buying too many things already. Well, perhaps *that*," said Nancy at random, pointing at the picture which French taste entitles *La Belle Jardinière*. It was a lucky guess enough.

"You shall have it, my darling," cried Arthur delighted, "I knew you had real taste at the bottom of your heart."

"Oh no, not I," cried Nancy, shrug-

ging her shoulders and dragging him on, "I don't care about it. It was only the first that caught my eye. Let us go on on quickly through the other rooms; we have been such a long time here. You must not buy that thing, what should I do with it? I don't really care for pictures. To be sure they make a room rather nice when they have nice frames; but we have not even a room to hang them in. But I will tell you what I should like to do," she continued, leading him out and in of the smaller rooms. "Let us go and get photographed, Arthur, *together*, in a nice large size. It will be a much nicer memorial of Paris. And then mamma would like it so much to hang up in the parlour and show to everybody. We must take her a present of some sort, and that would please ourselves too. She would like it a great deal better than that pink lady with the little boy."

"For heaven's sake don't describe the picture like that! Do you know it is a

famous Raffaelle," said Arthur, all the more horrified that some one had heard her young confident voice and had turned round to admire.

"What is a famous Raffaelle? I don't pretend to know anything about it; and I'd much rather have a picture of you; but what would be really delightful would be to be photographed together. I wonder I never thought of it before. Let us go and find some one as soon as we get out of this stupid place. Oh yes, I have seen everything I want to see."

Poor Arthur! he was pleased that she should want a portrait of himself. This flattering touch mended his wounds a little, and as she hurried him out again into the bright wintry streets (breathing, herself, a sigh of relief when they got fairly clear of the galleries), he said to himself with the new philosophy which had come to his aid: Well! how was it to be expected she should care for pictures, she who had never seen any? Of course the anticipa-

tion was quite absurd on his part. Art demands a special education. To plunge an unsophisticated mind without any training, without any preface, straight into the profundities of Leonardo, of Raffaelle, of Perugino, was ever anything so unreasonable? and then to expect her to understand at once! The poor young fellow felt that he had been hard upon his Nancy, though heaven knows, without meaning it. And then what a pretty idea that was of hers about the photograph! He had winced a little at the idea of having it hung up in Mrs. Bates's parlour, and exhibited to all her friends; hut that was a paltry feeling—and what could be more natural and delightful than that she should wish for such a memento of their honeymoon? That she should be so eager about it, was not that a proof that she was happy, notwithstanding all the little frets of her new position, and those ill-advised efforts of his to force her into his own conventional code of the right things to be admired?

That was all a matter of education, he felt sure. He had not thought it to be so before. He had supposed in his ignorance that a fine picture was like a fine landscape, comprehensible to everybody; but then Arthur recollected what he had read somewhere that it was very long even before people began to admire nature, that a generation or two back the Alps were only horrible snowy deserts, and mountains generally were looked upon as obstructions and eyesores by the common mind. This showed clearly (he said to himself) that education was everything. It not only *trained* the eye but might be said to create it, giving perceptions of beauty that actually had not existed before. This thread of thought kept him occupied as he went on through the bright streets, drawn by Nancy's eagerness to one of the shops where they had made their previous purchases, to ask about a photographer. She was in such spirits over the idea that she kept up the conversation and covered his silence; and

he had conducted his cogitation to a most satisfactory end, the conclusion that Nancy had really shown originality in her remarks and that it was a mere absurdity on his part to look for art knowledge from her—by the time they reached the shop, where they were received with the most cordial satisfaction, and where there were a great many new things to see which Nancy admired greatly. The shopkeeper had no difficulty in indicating an artist of his own acquaintance who, he had no doubt, would do justice to Madame, and would be too proud and happy to have such a subject. Arthur, however, came to himself when they had got this length, whether by the touch of the practical involved in buying some more pretty things for Nancy, or by the fact that he had proved her to his entire satisfaction to be quite justified in her indifference to the pictures in the Louvre; and he had sufficient good sense left to avoid the recommendation of the *modiste*, and take Nancy to a really good

photographer who gave them an appointment for the next day. They were both quite exhilarated by this engagement. It was something to do! They went back to their hotel in the afternoon, consoled and happy, talking about it. And while Nancy reposed herself and took out her dress for the evening, Arthur went to look at the newspapers as in duty bound. He took up the latest "Times," and hid himself behind its ample sheet; but he did not get much good of his reading. However distinctly you may make out that it is unreasonable to expect your bride to be interested in the interesting things of the place in which you are living, it is impossible to deny that it is very embarrassing when she is not. A girl who was frightened and chilled by Notre Dame, wearied at the Français, uninterested in the Louvre, what was her poor young husband to do with her? The weather was not favourable for those excursions which are so easy in summer. And besides what in-

terest could there be in Versailles, for example, to one who knew nothing about the Grand Monarque, and probably had never heard of Marie Antoinette? People do not marry their wives or their husbands because they understand Molière, and love the Great Masters, and know Continental history; but it is bewildering to be in Paris, or anywhere else for that matter, with a new companion who has no associations with anything, and is at once indifferent and ignorant of all that is in the past. What was he to do with her? Where was he to take her? Poor Arthur puzzled behind his "Times," and did not know.

That evening he took her to the Gymnase, and at first the spell seemed to tell. Nancy for the first act gave her attention to the stage, and certainly it was not such a failure as the Français. There was a good deal of love-making, and that interested her. But it ended as before, in disgust and weariness.

"I wish you would not take me to such places," she cried, "is it because you are afraid of an evening at home? When we are settled at home at Underhayes you will be obliged to put up with me, there will be no play there."

This speech was particularly galling to Arthur, because he had not the slightest intention of settling at Underhayes, and to have it taken for granted gave him a pang which was chiefly terror. Should he be able to resist the foregone conclusion which thus had established itself in Nancy's mind?

"Indeed," he said, "I should be glad to stay at home. Indeed I don't mind where I am, so long as you are there too. I do not care for the play."

"Then what do you go for? Ah! I know, to polish me up, to teach me how to behave, to remedy my defective education." This was once more said in the carriage as they were driving home.

"Nancy, you are unkind," said Arthur,

"why should you speak to me so? I know nothing about defective education. I took you to amuse you. You thought you would like it."

"I did not know they were such poor sticks," said Nancy, "I did not suppose they would gabble their French so. The people in the shops talk a great deal better. I never mistake them; and it worries me to look so stupid," she added relenting. "I should not mind for myself; but it looks so bad for you having a wife that does not understand."

"For me, my darling!" cried Arthur delighted. "Do I care? An evening at home will be a great deal more pleasant; but my wife never looks stupid, cannot look stupid," said the foolish young man. And again all was well.

Thus the course of their honey-days went on not without fluctuations. What he said in his foolishness, was true so far, that Nancy did not look stupid. She looked careless, defiant, indifferent,

scornful of what she saw, as of something which was not worth the trouble even of an effort to understand ; but there was nothing stupid in her aspect at any time, and in spite of herself, stray gleams of understanding came in to the girl's mind. Gleams which did not enlighten her then ; but which worked in the chaos, apart from any will of hers. Her will was all set steadfastly the other way, to reject all possibilities of improvement, and the idea of being educated up to her husband's level. Was not she as good as he to start with, was not her family as good as his family, if not better? Not so rich, but nicer, kinder people, to be upheld in their plainness above any attempt to pull them down. Nancy's native energy of mind all ran into vigorous scorn of any attempt to separate her from her own race and identify her with his. To think of her old self in the pit, admiring her new self triumphant in a private box was a sensation which, all delicious as it was, originated in herself

and was not betrayed to anyone. Had Arthur seemed to think of this difference, Nancy would have proposed at once to descend to the pit as the preferable plan. She had made an immense ascent in the social scale by her marriage; but she never meant to acknowledge, not if she should die for it, that the ascent was of any consequence to her, or that it was expedient to change her manners or her smallest actions because of it; was she not "good enough" for Arthur? Then why did Arthur choose to marry her? It was he who had asked her, she would have said, not she who had asked him. He had pledged himself to take her for better for worse; but she had not pledged herself to change anything in her life or habits on his account. And she did not mean to do it. She was not a fine lady; she did not wish to look like a fine lady. It was far better that everybody should know what she was and who she was from the beginning. The idea that Arthur had begun a process

of education struck her suddenly after that visit to the Louvre; why had he been so anxious that she should admire everything? Why should he take her to the theatre? He wanted her to learn French; but she would not learn French. She had not asked Arthur to marry her; he it was who had asked her, and he must take the consequences. She had no wish to be here in Paris. It would be far better to have a little house in Underhayes, where she could show her advancement to those who knew her, and distinguish herself in the only circle where as yet she wished to be distinguished. Such was the course of thought in Nancy's mind. This was curiously interfered with by the new thoughts which arose in her in spite of herself; but she clung to it all the same. She would go back upon the first grievance of her dress, the pink silk which he would not let her travel in, long after she had been convinced that the blue serge was better and more comfortable,

and even looked better, which was the most difficult doctrine of all. She was quite aware that if she had known then as much even as she knew now, she would never have dreamed of setting out upon her journey in her salmon-coloured "silk," yet still resented the fact that Arthur had objected to her "silk." She would not yield. She would not try to adapt herself to the "ways" he had been accustomed to. The Bateses were as good as the Curtises, and so she would prove. But every day, in spite of herself, Nancy became more and more aware how far different her habits were from her husband's, how unlike his were all her ways of thinking. But she would never, never give in, she said to herself. It was he who had asked her, not she who had asked him.

This was very different from Arthur's eager desire to make out, after every new demonstration of the difference between them, that Nancy could not act in any

other way, that it was absurd to expect other things from her. He was by far the humblest of the two, the most tolerant and forbearing. Indeed Nancy was not forbearing at all. She took offence at a look, and blazed into sudden wrath at the merest possibility of a suggestion of anything derogatory; whereas he bore numberless little shafts launched at his family, at fine people who thought themselves superior, at dainty ways and prejudices about dress and modes of living. Whenever she showed her ignorance more conspicuously than usual, or was more painfully unequal to some claim upon her, poor Arthur plunged once again into thought proving to himself that this was what he ought to have looked for, that nothing else would have been natural. He justified her in this way for everything she did, and everything she proved unable to do. But still it was rather a trying process, and the conclusion he came to at the end of a week was that Paris had

not been a successful place to think of for the honeymoon. Honeymooning is more difficult in winter than in summer. There is so much more to be done in the latter season, and the open air harmonizes a great many things. Whereas two people not used to each other's society, not interested in the same pursuits, brought up in perfectly different ways, and with no resources, shut up together even in a beautiful little apartment in a fine hotel on the Rue de Rivoli, what are they to do? The photograph was a charming occupation for one day, and it was tolerably successful, as successful as photographs ever are, and was the object of great admiration in Underhayes, when done up in a velvet frame. Nancy sent it home.

"I hope you are soon going to follow," Mrs. Bates wrote, and Nancy gave the letter to her husband to read. Certainly Paris had not been very successful. They had contented themselves with drives and

walks after that mournful day at the Louvre, had gone to the Bois, which was rather naked at this time of the year, and walked about and got tired. And in the evening they had sat "at home" in the hotel. But Nancy had nothing to do, not even a scrap of fancy work, and when Arthur read to her, fell asleep; and they went to bed very early, which both of them felt was always a virtuous thing to do, if rather dull. And thus a fortnight of the honeymoon came not very cheerfully to an end.

CHAPTER IV.

"I DON'T think you care for Paris," said Arthur to his wife. They were driving out to the Bois, and the rain was drizzling, and it was not gay. There were fewer quarrels in this dull interval, but perhaps the fact scarcely improved the liveliness, if it slightly added to the happiness of their life.

"No," she said, with some vivacity; "not at all. It was very nice for a day or two. But now we seem to have got all we wanted, don't we, Arthur? Another afternoon in the Roo, or in the Palay Royal, just to pick up a few little presents, and I should be quite content to go as soon as you please."

"You have seen very little, Nancy."

"Oh, little! I have seen the whole place, all the best shops, and the best streets. I don't know what more there is to see."

"People will not talk about the shops and streets," said Arthur, in his most didactic way; "but about the pictures in the Louvre, and about Notre Dame; and what music you have heard, and what plays you have seen."

"I am sure mamma will never ask me any such questions," said Nancy, "and I don't suppose you are going to take me to see your great friends."

"That reminds me," said Arthur, nervously clearing his throat, "of a favour I was going to ask of you. Will you do something—that will be very disagreeable—for me, Nancy, for my sake?"

She looked at him very keenly, examining his face, conscious that this seeming simple prayer meant something more than appeared. "What is it?" she said, with a gleam of suspicion in her eyes.

"You will not promise then? you are cautious, Nancy. I should have pledged

myself to do anything and everything for your sake."

"What is it?" she repeated. "It is so easy to say what it is at once."

"It is this then—do not reply in a hurry—I am very anxious about it, Nancy; don't you think you might write a few lines—to my mother."

"To your mother!" the audacity of the proposal took away her breath.

"Yes, I am going to write—to say what I truly feel: that I am sorry to have offended her—"

"Sorry to have married me!" she cried, almost jumping out of the carriage in her vehemence. She looked at him, trembling with rage and wonder. How could he face her and ask such a thing? How could he frame the words? did he think she was going to give in, to yield now, without rhyme or reason, she who was certainly determined never to yield?

"You know that is not the case," he said; "you know that I have not repented marrying you—and never will.

But, Nancy, it is not for our happiness or— well, I will say interest, though it is an ugly word—to be estranged from my mother. I want to write to her to tell her that I am grieved, hush! to have offended her. I should have known better. I should have managed so as that she might have seen you—known you, before she condemned me—"

"That is that you are sorry you did not send me on approval, as the shopkeepers say—*me!* Do you suppose I would have done it? Do you think I could have endured for a moment—"

"Can I not ask you a favour—acknowledging it to be a favour, without a quarrel?" said Arthur. "We have been married a fortnight, and how often have we quarrelled already? Nancy, is it worth the while? Could we not discuss a matter that concerns us both, calmly, without anger? If it seems to you impossible, say so. Am I unreasonable to torment you about a thing you refuse? But why quarrel—I hate it—and you cannot—like it"

"How do you know I don't like it?" she cried; then stopped herself, with some dim perception of her folly. "I will not do it," she said, doggedly, "that is enough. My lady has never taken any notice of me—no, nor even your sister, that you are always holding up as a model. I will not lay myself down at their feet to be trampled upon; you may do it yourself, if you please."

"I shall certainly write," he said. "There will be no treading upon; but I shall write. If you will not do it, of course I cannot help it; but if you will be persuaded—out of your love for me—then I will be grateful to you, very grateful, Nancy. I will not say any more."

"I shall not do it," she said; and then there ensued a silence, which was so long that it alarmed her. Generally Arthur had been but too obsequious, anxious to make up, to clear away any lingering cloud; but this time he said nothing. The fact was that his mind was too full of a multitude of thoughts to leave him any time to speak. He was wondering,

in a kind of desolate way, what to do. He had ceased to be an independent agent, he could not go there and come here at his own pleasure. To be sure he was supposed to be the authority, to decide everything, to regulate every step they took; but how different this was in reality from the sound of it! A man has a right to take his wife where he pleases—yes, when she will go; but if the man is a tender-hearted, generous, foolish, impulsive young fellow in love, what becomes of this sublime authority of his? just about as much as comes of all the defences the law can place around a woman to save her from cruelty and oppression, when she happens to be of a like nature and loves her tyrant. Law is one thing, and love is another. Arthur did not know how to oppose Nancy, how to make any move without her agreement and sympathy, and he had already had many indications which way her mind was fixed. She wanted to go home to England, to Underhayes: and he wanted her to stay away, to remove further off from Eng-

land. His whole mind was occupied by the discussion of expedients how to manage this, how to persuade her from her desire. And he was not even aware of the silence into which he sank, and which she thought so deliberate, and done with so distinct an intention of punishing her. They drove along in the Victoria, which had carried them about so often, side by side neither saying a word. Already Nancy's appearance had changed. She had put aside her travelling-dress for another "silk" which Arthur had given her, and which was also dark blue in colour; over this she wore a warm mantle trimmed with soft fur about the throat and wrists, a delicate little bonnet, all corresponding, with that graceful Parisian taste, which is not to be picked up in the Paris streets any more than in the London shops, but dwells in its own costly shrine apart. All this changed Nancy's appearance wonderfully. There was still, perhaps, something in her bearing when she was on foot, that showed the tax-collector's daughter, the

pretty girl of a country town, a little swing and loudness, a careless step and defiant pose; but in the carriage by her husband's side, wrapped up in those furs, reclining in absolute ease and well-being, Nancy might have been a duke's daughter for anything anyone could say. There were many of the people about who noticed them as they drove along, the handsome young English couple, usually so lively, to-day so taciturn. A man cannot belong to "Society," cannot be brought up at Eton and Oxford, even if he is not in Society, without being known, and there were plenty of people who recognised Arthur Curtis, and wondered over his companion—who was she? They had not believed at first that she was his wife. One of these men, more curious than the rest, came to the edge of the pathway now as the Victoria got into the line, and was obliged to go slowly.

"Curtis! is it really you, old fellow? I had been told you were here, but I could not believe my eyes."

"Was there anything so strange in my

being here?" said Arthur, rousing himself up. This was one of the men who know everything and everybody, who have it in their power to convey a bad or good impression to more important persons than themselves. This put Arthur at once on his mettle. "You must let me introduce you to my wife," he said, "My friend, Denham, Nancy. We have not been very long here."

Nancy was excited by this sudden encounter with one of Arthur's friends, one of those, perhaps, who knew his "folks," and belonged to that unknown sphere of which she felt at once curious and defiant. She did not know very well what to do, whether to shake hands with him, or to refrain. Happily the instinct of comfortableness which suggested no change of position made her bow only, and as this little gesture was accompanied by a blush, very natural to the bridal condition and sentiment, the newcomer swore to himself, by Jove! that, were she as good as she looked, Curtis had got a prize.

"Beg pardon for intruding on your domestic happiness," he said; "but the truth was I had not heard— Not much going on is there? But Paris is as good a place as another for this dreary time of the year."

"No, I don't suppose there is much going on, we have been nowhere; and we are off again directly, for Rome, I think," said Arthur. "Paris is empty like other places. We have not seen a soul we know."

"I don't suppose you were likely to look for them," said Denham. "Would Mrs. Curtis care to see the bear-fight in the Assembly? sometimes it is fun. I will see after it, if you like, on the first good day?"

"Should you, Nancy?" said Arthur, turning to her. Nancy had not a notion what the Assembly or the bear-fight was. She positively trembled in terror of saying something wrong. She who had never hesitated before.

"I—don't know," she said; "I don't care for any—fighting."

"Oh, they are all muzzled," said Denham, laughing. "Meurice's? I will call and let you know."

"Thanks, but it is not worth the trouble; we shall be off in a few days."

"If you go to Rome, Neville is there," cried the stranger after them, as the line moved on more quickly; and he took off his hat to Nancy with a respectful politeness that enchanted her; she was pleased with the novelty of talking to a stranger even for a moment. It made the air a little less still and self-absorbed.

"Who is he?" she asked, with momentary awe.

"Denham, he's one of the attachés here, not a bad fellow; but talks like half-a-dozen old women."

"We need not mind how Mr. Denham talks," said Nancy, with a little elevation of her head. "We have nothing to be afraid of. He can talk as much as he likes for what I care."

"Isn't there? But he is Sir John, not Mr. Denham," said Arthur, carelessly.

Nancy sat a little more upright, shak-

ing herself free of the wraps, and her eyes glistened. "Was that a baronet?" she said, with a little awe—then added, "And so will you be, Arthur. I don't understand saying anything but Mr. to a gentleman. But you will be a baronet, too."

"Not for a long time, I hope," said Arthur, with a sigh. It brought him back to all the tangled course of his own affairs. He was not by nature the kind of son who calculates on the time that must elapse before he comes to his kingdom, and it was very strange to him to see his wife's eyes brighten at the idea of that "rise in life," which meant his father's death. "Poor old governor, I hope he may live to be a hundred," he said, with a half-laugh, which was a half-sigh. Nancy did not join in this wish. She stared a little with consternation at the thought.

"What did—the gentleman—mean about bear-fighting? Is it a Zoological garden? Assembly in some places means a ball," said Nancy, "it was rather a jumble; what did he mean?"

"He meant the French Parliament, in which they make the laws, as the House of Commons does in England—or at least, we may say so for the sake of description," said Arthur; to which Nancy replied with a little startled "Oh!" of disappointment and suspicion.

"Do ladies go to such places? I thought ladies had never anything to do with politics."

"My dear Nancy," said Arthur, seizing the opportunity to be instructive, "when you go into society, you will find that people talk a great deal about such things, whether they care for them or not; they *are* the things that people talk about. And it is reasonable to think," he went on, more and more improving the occasion, "that, when you are in a foreign country, you should like to see what is most important in it. That is always taken for granted. You see Denham thought that was one of the things you would like to see."

This silenced Nancy more than could have been supposed possible. She had

never seen this stranger before, and probably never would see him again; but the fact that he had expected her to know what he meant, and to be interested in the French Parliament, impressed her infinitely more than all Arthur's anxious efforts for her improvement. Were ladies like that, she could not help asking herself? What a bother it would be to be a lady, if that was the sort of thing they were expected to care for—a lot of old men making speeches, which she could not understand one word of! but that of course nobody could be supposed to know. She was overawed, and received Arthur's sermon more meekly than she had received any of his didactic addresses before. She supposed now that sister of his, that Lucy, would have gone and understood every word, that she would have liked the play-acting, and talked about it, and laughed as Arthur did, that she would have seen a great deal in those stupid old pictures. Nancy was silent and dismayed. To be a lady seemed to her a hard trade. How different from the case of

Underhayes, the talk about Lizzie Brown and Raisins, the grocer, in the snug parlour where everybody was so comfortable! Her mother and Sarah Jane never would ask her about the bear-fighting in the Assembly, nor how she liked M. Got. A longing for home seized the girl, and a terror of what seemed before her. To be sure, if she had known it, the talk about Lizzie Brown was quite as much in Sir John Denham's way as in that of Mrs. Bates; but then his Lizzie Brown was perhaps an Empress, which makes a difference more or less. The two young people had never been so silent in each other's company. They drove back so full of many thoughts that neither perceived the pre-occupation of the other, and oddly enough they were both thinking of their homes; Arthur, with a pang, but without any desire to find himself there—Nancy with the strongest determination to get back. There was a half-smile in Arthur's eyes, but a smile which was strangely associated with that pain behind the eyeballs and slight constriction of the

throat, which means unsheddable tears, as his home seemed to rise up before him among its woods. He saw his father in his library, his mother in that gilded and satin-hung morning-room, which was *à la Louis Quinze*, but which nobody thought in bad taste, as we see people in a dream. They did not look at him, nor welcome him, and he did not wish to be there. How could he take Nancy there? He was separated from them, perhaps for ever, and he could scarcely wish it to be otherwise. But Nancy on her side thought of home with much livelier feelings. Oh, only to be there! free to show all her pretty things, her new "silks," her trinkets and furs: to let everybody see how fine she was: to talk just as she liked, not to be made to admire anything she did not understand—not to be burdened with bonds beyond her comprehension, limits of speech, and word, and action, beyond which it was not "becoming," not "appropriate," not "right" perhaps, that she should go. At home she had done what she liked, run out of

doors when she pleased, laughed as loudly as she pleased, been as ignorant as she pleased. It did not occur to Nancy that at home it had been her inclination to stand on her superiority, as one who had been five quarters at school, and was altogether "a cut above" Matilda and Sarah Jane.

They were sitting after dinner that evening, yawning a little, when Sir John Denham's card was brought to Arthur. He looked at Nancy half doubtfully, an expression which she caught at once. "Shall he come up, or shall I go down to him?" he said.

"Oh just as you like," said Nancy, with the quick thought passing through her mind that Arthur did not choose that his fine friends should see her. He looked at her again; in reality to see what she wished; but to Nancy it seemed an inquisitorial glance, criticising her all over, if perhaps she was "fit to be seen."

"I will go down and bring him up," he said. When he was gone, Nancy too looked at herself in one of the many mirrors. She still wore the dark blue silk

dress which had been made for her since she came to Paris, with ruffles of lace at the throat and wrists. It was very plain. Should she run and put on the salmon-coloured one, which was a great deal finer, before Arthur returned with the stranger? She hesitated a moment; but her good angel interfered and kept her still. Sir John Denham thought her on the whole a lady-like young woman when he came into the room. Evidently there must be something queer about the business altogether, Denham thought; but she was very pretty, and looked *comme il faut*, so far as he could see.

"I have to make a thousand apologies," he said, "but I thought it better to run up and tell my story myself, hoping that Curtis would intercede for me as an old friend. May I be allowed to open my mouth at all, at such an inappropriate moment? A thousand thanks; I came to say that if you would be at the Palais de Justice at twelve to-morrow, I could meet you there with La Pic, who is a friend of mine, and would take you in.

There is to be an *interpellation* which probably may be amusing—and if you are going on so soon—"

"It is very kind of you, Denham, I am sure my wife will like it."

"Mrs. Curtis looks a little doubtful, I think," said Denham, "but of course you must not mind me. It is only if it will amuse you."

Nancy vacillated between two courses; she was tempted to a little bravado, to avow boldly her ignorance, and shame the pretensions which her husband made on her behalf; and on the other hand she was also tempted to commend herself to this stranger, who was a real baronet, and finer than anyone she had ever talked with before. Why should she let him see how little she knew? And in this wavering she took a long time to make up her reply.

"I do not understand much about—politics," she said.

"Especially French politics, I suppose," said Sir John, smiling and showing large white teeth. "So I should think, Mrs. Curtis; *I* don't understand them though

it is my business; but it is fine to see how they fly at each other, and will not keep still for all the Presidents in the world. I hope Curtis has been letting you see a little of Paris. We must excuse him, I suppose, for keeping you so entirely to himself."

"We have been at a theatre or two," said Arthur carelessly, "that is all; we are just passing through."

"And I am sorry there is nothing going on yet; after Christmas, if you were staying, I might be of some use. Some of the balls are worth going to in the Carnival. But why should I tell this to you who, probably, know a great deal better than I do—"

"Oh no," said Nancy, "I have never been in Paris before."

"Ah, that accounts—" said Sir John. "The fact is I have been wondering that I had not seen you anywhere; what luck for Curtis to have so many new things to show you. But there is not much going on. I suppose you are going to Oakley for Christmas, Curtis. Lucky fellow, with nothing to do but amuse yourself. Put

me at the feet of the ladies there; I have not seen Lady Curtis or your sister for ages. A poor beggar like me would not know what to do with such a place, otherwise I should envy you, Oakley. What a place! what woods! what a park! it is only in England that one sees anything like it."

"You were always a romancer, Denham, Oakley is nothing particular. Being home it is very pleasant; but as a model of an English house—"

"I maintain it is, and Mrs. Curtis shall judge between us. It is not a feudal castle—I allow you might find finer things in that line; it has neither moat nor dungeon, I suppose; but for a gentleman's house—why, we have nothing in the least like it here. Don't you agree with me, Mrs. Curtis? You have not been long enough in the family to depreciate their good things as they do. I am sure you will give your vote for Oakley against anything you see between this and Rome, of its kind—I wait for your support."

It was a strange situation enough. Denham did not understand; but he

divined, and liked to play with the unknown danger in Nancy's doubtful looks, and Curtis's evident anxiety. As for Nancy, she looked at her husband with a perceptible tremor. She wanted him to instruct her, to indicate what she was to say: though, had it been possible that he could have dictated to her, that very fact would have made her perverse. At last she said hesitating, "I have seen—so little—I could not judge—I have never been out of England before."

"Ah, that accounts—" said Denham vaguely; and he was very much puzzled by this subdued bride, who had no enthusiasm either for the new world she was visiting or the old world which she had left so lately. He tried to draw her out on a variety of subjects; but Nancy, though at intervals an impulse of self-revelation would come upon her, and it was on her lips to tell him that she knew nothing of Oakley, and cared nothing, and should never be there, nor go to Rome, nor do any one of these things he was talking of, was on the other hand so

afraid of betraying herself that she held back, looking stiff and silent, and scarcely could be got to say a word. As for Arthur, his anxiety made him somewhat excited and restless, it took away all ease from his manner. He wanted her to join in the conversation, to come out of the shell of reserve in which she had shut herself up; and yet he was afraid of what she might say if once roused. She was a clever girl, with much natural energy and force; but yet it was annoying how entirely the daughter of Bates the tax-collector was at a loss listening to the conversation of the two men who were not clever, yet who knew by nature many things of which she had not a notion. This Assembly they wanted her to go to, what was it? Why should she go? What was an inter—inter—what? Their world and hers were totally different, though one of them was her husband. She was relieved when they veered into gossip and began to talk of people, though she did not know the people. There she could follow them even in her ignorance; for had not she too a Lizzie Brown?

CHAPTER V.

"WHY cannot we go home?" said Nancy. "I don't want to stay here. I don't want to go to your Rome, and places. What is the good of taking me away to make a show of me? I can speak English, but I don't know any of those jargons. I am sure it is not good French here; and as for Italian, I never heard a word of it. It is only to make me look ridiculous. Denham thinks so, Arthur. He comes and looks at me, and asks me about old Lady So-and-So. I tell him I don't know her, and I don't want to know her. I shall tell him some day I never knew Lady Anybody in my life, and that *I* am a nobody. I will, if you do not take me away!"

"Do tell him so," said Arthur, "if you please. I don't mind what you tell him. You don't think I want you to make believe? You are all I wish for, Nancy, yourself—better than if you had known a dozen Lady So-and-So's."

"Oh, but I am sure you watch me," she cried. "I always feel that your eye is upon me, Arthur. You are afraid I will say something wrong; and I am afraid too, except when I want to do it: and if I should do it some time, as I am sure I will if we go on, you will not like it. Arthur, don't let us go further off; let us go home."

"Home? where is home?" he said. "I don't know if I should have any welcome."

"But I should," cried Nancy. "Mother and all of them would dance for joy. And think how much better we should be. We must be spending a mint of money here. You talk of going further, but I don't believe you will be able to go further when you look into it. And I don't know what we have to spend: you don't tell me anything."

"I scarcely know myself," said Arthur, with rather a bewildered look upon his face. "I don't know what my father—things should be different now."

"And you are going away travelling without knowing? You will find," said Nancy, becoming practical all at once, "that we have spent a great deal of money; always having carriages and going to the play—"

"Not to many plays."

"Two; and that music Denham gave us tickets for—"

"My darling, don't be angry—but would you mind saying Sir John?"

"Why should I say Sir John? You always call him Denham. And when we went to that Assembly there was another carriage. I suppose it would always be the same if we were going to other places; but at Underhayes it would not be like that. We could take a little house and furnish it, and you have such good taste, Arthur. We would make it so pretty, and everybody would be delighted to see us. I should manage everything, and keep the expenses right, and you—you—"

"Yes!" said Arthur, taking her hands into his as she stood by him, "What for me? I should have nothing to do."

"Well! when one has plenty to live on, what does it matter? It will always be delightful. We shall take walks. Don't you remember the common, how beautiful it was? And now and then we will go to London; and in the evening we can—you can read out loud to me," said Nancy, stopping, with a little confusion. "We can go and see mother," was what she was about to say; but she stopped instinctively, and kept that in the background. She was standing by his chair, putting her fingers through his hair, arranging and re-arranging it with soft touches, each one of which was a caress. It was seldom that she was in this tender mood, and he felt himself melting under it. Sometimes she would stoop down and put her cheek against his. "You would teach me all sorts of things," said Nancy. "Sometimes I know I am not good-tempered, Arthur. I give you a great deal of trouble. It makes me wild to think that I am not

like you, that I don't do you credit; and then my temper gets the better of me, and I say I am as good as they are, why should I trouble?"

As she made this confession, tears came trembling into Nancy's eyes and stole into her voice. She had never before revealed to her husband the state of mind which made her so capricious, and as she told it, all those vagaries of temper which had tormented Arthur, became sacred things to him, and beautiful in the light of love and penitence. He took into his arms this tender culprit, whose avowal made all her faults into virtues.

"Don't, my darling!" he cried; "don't! Not like me? You are far better than I am. Not do me credit? Nancy! don't you know I am as proud of you as I am fond of you—and can anything be more than that? Teach you! What could I teach you? It is you who teach me."

And he meant what he said, and she meant it, to the bottom of their foolish young hearts, and it was all true and all false, as only human things can be.

Nancy, though her heart was melting and running over with the tenderness of her confession, was as ready to be defiant as ever at half a moment's notice, and Arthur as sure soon to be doubtful of her, alarmed and anxious, uncertain as to what she might do or say. But neither of them was at all aware of this as they clung together and mutually repented, and declared that never again, never again should anything disturb their harmony and full understanding of each other.

"There are so many things you could teach me," Nancy said, smiling through her tears, "in our own little house at home! You could make a lady of me. Oh, yes, we all thought you had done that when we were married, but now I know better. But you can make a lady of me, Arthur, if you will try."

"You are a lady already, my darling," he said; but how sweet was this consciousness of what was wanting in herself, and the confidence that he could communicate all she wanted! It was like an inspiration direct from Heaven.

"I will study whatever you wish," said Nancy. "We could give ourselves up to it if we were only in a little house of our own. Whatever you please, Arthur; French if you like, for I am ashamed not to understand it when you talk it so well, and I don't think it can have been much good what I learned at school; and about pictures and buildings, and everything. I don't know *anything*, Arthur. I could not understand the things you were talking about, Denham and you; and I know you were vexed about the pictures, and the theatre."

"No, my sweetest, I was not vexed—perhaps a little disappointed; but I knew it was because you had not seen any before."

"That was all. I know a little better already; and, Arthur, if you were to give this winter to it, and help me, in our own little house! So near London as Underhayes is, we could go up and see things; and you could read books to me. I think I can see it all," said Nancy, smiling upon him with her wet eyes; "a little drawing-

room with lace curtains and windows that opened to the garden, and another nice little room with your pipes in it, where I could come and sit by your side while you smoked your cigar !"

"But, Nancy, might not all this beautiful picture come to pass, just as well in Italy? You don't know what Italy is. None of your dull wet days, but always soft, bright, sunshiny weather, and the bluest sky, and such moonlight nights. We need not go to Rome at all. I know a little village up amongst the woods with a view of the sea. Nancy! you can't think how beautiful it is!"

"I don't care," she said, with a little pout. "I don't want to go to Italy. It is so far, so far away; and I cannot speak the language; and it is so dreary to live among people, and hear them chattering, and not understand."

"But you would very soon learn Italian. It is the easiest language—everybody says so," said Arthur. "You could pick it up in a few weeks. You would so soon feel

at home there. The good people are fond of everything that is beautiful. Oh, they are not all good people, I suppose. Sometimes they will ask too much from you; they will, perhaps, cheat you a little, in quite a friendly way—"

"I could not endure that!" cried Nancy. "That is the one thing I could not put up with; and foreigners are all like that, Arthur; they pretend kindness so long as they have something to gain; but they don't really care. Oh! there is nothing like England," she cried, clasping her hands, "and a little house of our own! And in the summer, when, perhaps, your people may have changed their mind, Arthur, *then* I should not be afraid to meet with them. I should know a great many things that I don't know now. And we should be so happy, both together, and no one to interfere with us."

Arthur was moved to the bottom of his heart. It did not occur to him to think of her own description of "foreigners," who pretend kindness as long as they have something to gain. Nay, more than that,

she did not think of it either. Nancy was quite sincere. By talking about it, she had made a certainty in her own mind that this was really all she wanted, that in such circumstances happiness would come of itself, without frets or interruption; and in what other way could that be secured? She was so earnest in carrying her point, that she really felt all she expressed. Whereas, if he took her away, if he insisted on *his* plan, Nancy felt that she could not answer for herself. It was for his sake as well as hers; it was for their good as well as for their happiness. And what could Arthur answer to all this? The fact that she wanted anything, was not that the most powerful argument for having it? His own inclinations were strongly in favour of absence, and he believed that this teaching of which she spoke, and which he had fully intended, could get itself accomplished far better on the Riviera, or in the villa among the chestnut woods at Castellamare than anywhere near the house of the Bates'. But what could he do or say against her? He

tried to beguile her into talk of what might happen after, when they would go into society, and when, perhaps, he should be able to take her to Oakley to see all its beauties. But this was a subject of which Nancy was very shy. She would not speak of Arthur's "people," whom she no longer called "folks." When she did make their acquaintance, she wanted to do so in a way which would dazzle them. She could not tolerate the idea of any condescension on their part to Arthur's wife. No, she must have surmounted all difficulties, and feel able to consider herself as much a lady as any of them, before she met those ladies who were her natural enemies and rivals. For Arthur's sake she would avoid them until she could burst upon them in full glory of new instruction and knowledge.

"Don't speak to me about Oakley," she said. "It was all I could do to make sure Oakley was its name when Denham talked of it. It makes me angry to hear of it. I, your wife, not to know it, not to know anything about it or them! when

every poor creature of an ambassador's flunkey goes there."

"Don't be too hard upon old Denham," said Arthur, laughing. "How he would be pleased to hear you! But not Denham, Nancy, if you love me. Your mouth was not made to drop words in that careless way."

"Oh, nonsense, Arthur! What should I say? Sir John is so formal. *You* would not say Denham if it was wrong," said Nancy, recovering a little from the too great amiability of this episode; and then she added, "You have asked me to do something for you. I will do it. I will not bargain with you, but I will do it; only you must not see my letter, or school me. I will write out of my own head."

"Will you, Nancy? You are always a darling, always kinder than I deserve; but at least you will let me see it—send it with mine?"

"No," she said; "no, no, no; but I will write. Now, will that please you? And you will yield to me, like a dear good

Arthur, and take me home. I do so wish to go home."

"That looks as if you were tired of me, Nancy."

"Does it?" she said with a smile, putting her arm softly about his neck.

She was not addicted to caresses. There was a kind of rude delicacy and reserve in her, which a little more gentleness of manner would have made into that exquisite bloom of modesty which is the crown of all graces. That soft touch said more from her than the utmost *abandon* of lovingness from another. Poor Arthur was all subdued; he could not resist her; her tenderness filled him with happiness beyond expression. If she would but be always thus, in spite of all he might have to pay for it, what man was there in the world so blessed as he? That even at this exquisite moment he had the strength of mind not to commit himself finally to the carrying out of her wish, was more than could have been expected. It was, perhaps, because "Denham" arrived at that moment to accompany them to a morning

performance at the "Conservatoire," for which his zeal had with difficulty got them tickets. They had not wanted to go, but "Denham" had insisted upon it. Nancy went away to put on her bonnet as he came upstairs. How near she had been to success! Her heart was full of confidence and pleasure in the thought, and this gave a brightness to her countenance which was all it wanted.

"What have you been doing to your wife? She is radiant. She will have a great *succès*, and you and I will shine in her lustre," said their companion to Arthur, as they arrived at the concert-rooms.

How proudly Arthur looked at her, exhilarated yet subdued as she was by that delightful sense of having got, or nearly got, her own way! This happiness had taken from Nancy the look of defiant watchfulness which generally gave a sense of unrest and discomfort to her beauty. For the first time since their marriage she looked at her ease and unafraid. He was so absorbed in her that he did not see a

well-known face close to him, nor dream of any interruption of his felicity until, at the first interval in the music, some one reached a fan across from another bench and tapped him on the shoulder.

"Why, Arthur, Arthur! don't you know us?" a voice said. It seemed to curdle the blood in his veins. He turned round with a sense of absolute dismay.

Behind him—how could he have missed the grey head of the old Indian, the overwhelming bonnet of his aunt, the demure correctness of the English young lady, all three in a row?—sat General Curtis, his uncle, father of the Rev. Hubert, who was Rector of Oakley, with the two ladies who ministered to him. What so natural as that these excellent people should be in Paris? They were on their way home from the German baths where the General went for his gout. And the wife and daughter, worn to death by the process which screwed the General up for the rest of the year, had need of a little taste of Paris to refresh their jaded souls. It was Mrs. Curtis who called "Arthur, Arthur!"

A discussion had gone on between the three from the moment that Arthur appeared with the young woman, whose advent filled these ladies with a thrill of curiosity. "Don't you meddle with what don't concern you," growled the General. Arthur was known to have made a dreadful connection, to have married somebody who was nobody, and generally to be in a bad way; and the sight of Nancy had startled this group beyond expression, as she came in looking happy and beautiful in her dainty Parisian bonnet.

"She looks a perfect lady, mamma; why shouldn't we?" said Mary Curtis, who was charitable and disposed to be "gushing."

"It concerns us as much as it concerns anyone, except his father and mother," Mrs. Curtis said. Both wife and daughter were disposed to be rebellious to the dictum of the head of the house. They had gone through so much for him. Now they were on ground which they felt to be their own, and on which he was no longer supreme, and his opposition quickened

their desire to penetrate Arthur's mystery. No one in the family had seen her, they would be the first, and even that thought was pleasant. "That is Sir John Denham on the other side; if she was very bad would he show himself with them *in public*," said Mrs. Curtis.

"What does a fellow like that care?" the General growled back, "the *demi-monde* is what he likes best."

"Oh, hush, Anthony, think of Mary," said his wife, "he may like the *demi-monde*, as you say; but I don't think he'd like to show himself with them *in public*. And really she looks very nice. What a pretty bonnet! Anthony, you cannot pass by your own nephew."

"I won't have anything to say to him; if you do, you must take the consequence," said the General.

"Oh do, mamma, do!" cried Mary at her other side. And the result was that Mrs. Curtis put her fan over somebody's shoulder and called "Arthur, Arthur!" and filled the young man's mind with unutterable dismay.

"Aunt Curtis!" said Arthur, rising to his feet. He grew crimson with the sudden emergency, with the surprise, "Who would have thought of seeing you here?"

"Indeed if you had thought at all on the subject, you might have made sure we should be here," said Mrs. Curtis, and then she stooped forward and raised her head to whisper: "She is very pretty, Arthur, and of course you think her as nice as she is pretty. Would she like to be introduced to me?"

"She must be now that you are here," said Arthur, not with any great eagerness. He took her offer a great deal too easily as a matter of course, not as the distinguished kindness she intended it to be. But her curiosity had reached to a very high point, and there was a touch of kindness as well as of self-importance in the idea of being able to mediate in the family affairs. Besides Sir John Denham was chatting familiarly on the other side of the bride, whose looks in her Paris bonnet were unexceptionable; and Sir John Denham was a very useful man to

know in Paris, and one before whom many doors opened. And though her husband grumbled and held back, her daughter was still more anxious than she was.

"Oh, Arthur, how pretty she is!" Mary Curtis murmured to her cousin, while her mother made up her mind. It was Mary or some one like her who ought to have been elected to fill the post Nancy had secured, to become the future Lady Curtis. If that post had been filled up by competitive examination, as men's situations are nowadays, no doubt Mary would have got it; and looking at it entirely as a public position without reference to Arthur (who after all was but a necessary adjunct, and not everything) Mary felt a lively interest, touched with doubt of her qualifications, in the successful candidate. She was anxious to inspect her, to have the satisfaction of feeling, which is a very general sentiment, that she herself could have done it better. Would this girl have the least idea how to behave in so important a post? Mary gave her mother little pushes and pinches to urge her on.

"I hope you have taken her to see your mother, Arthur," said Mrs. Curtis, "she is of course the first person to be thought of. Ah, you have not, you naughty boy! well, if you wish it I will go and speak to her before the music begins again. No, Mary, not you, you had better stay where you are. Papa will be vexed if we both go."

"Oh, papa! it is always papa," said Mary, as her mother swept past her, almost sweeping her out of her seat. Mrs. Curtis was large and ample both in figure and drapery, and looked like Society impersonated as she swept round in front into the vacant space before Nancy, with a solemnity becoming the occasion. Nancy looked up alarmed at the coming of this large lady, and if it was partly defiance and resistance, it was also partly shyness, and fright, and ignorance as to what it was right to do, that kept her from rising to receive this imposing introduction. Mrs. Curtis made her a curtsey, which the girl blushing hotly, and confused between pride and shame and helpless ignorance, returned

only with a little tremulous inclination of her head. Oh, if she only knew what was the most polite yet the most disdainful thing to do!

"I am afraid you scarcely know who I am," said the large lady, "Arthur has not had much time yet to tell you about his relations. I am your husband's aunt, Mrs. Arthur; we are all very fond of him. But you have not seen any of the family yet, I am sorry to hear."

"No," said Nancy, feeling waves of hot blood come up to her temples. She confronted her new acquaintance without looking at her, with eyes half concealed by her eyelids, dumbly defiant. Arthur's relations might come and stare at her, and talk to her as they pleased, but she would make no advances. And they could not make much, she thought, out of yes and no.

"Arthur shall tell me where you are, and I will come to see you to-morrow," said Mrs. Curtis. "I think it is only right for his sake, and I hope you will not be frightened of me. I will do anything I can to be of use to you, for Arthur's sake,

that is, of course, if you wish it. Sir John Denham, I think," she added, turning to him. Denham had withdrawn a few steps from the family meeting, as courtesy demanded. "I met you, I think, years and years ago at the Carringtons', though I see you have forgotten me."

"As if that were possible!" said Denham, in a tone which half offended Nancy. He had pretended to be her friend and Arthur's; yet here he was just as friendly with the enemy. "But they are going to begin again, I am afraid. Will you take this place," he said, offering her his vacant chair. Mrs. Curtis paused to reflect that to place herself beside Arthur's wife *in public*, was more than was required of her; more, indeed, than was perfectly discreet in the circumstances. So she made her doubtful niece-in-law a bow, and took Arthur's arm again.

"I must return to my own party I fear," she said, "but I shall hope to see you to-morrow." Nancy found herself for a moment left entirely alone, while this unexpected intruder upon her happiness squeezed back again into her place,

for Denham too had deserted her, as she saw by a backward glance, to renew acquaintance with the fine young lady behind, with whom Arthur too lingered, leaving her seated there in front alone. The din of the orchestra recommenced, which Nancy was not sufficiently instructed to admire, and her head began to ache with jealous pain and misery. The heat of the place, the languor of the afternoon, the crash of the music, made an atmosphere of confusion and sickening incongruity all around her. Oh, to be in the little parlour at home again! oh, to be Nancy Bates, with no fine ladies to question, or fine gentlemen to thrust the village girl to the front of this alien assembly, where all the people knew each other, and understood what was going on, except only she. These women! she had never expected any inquisition of this kind. She would have liked to jump up and rush away, no matter where, only to be free of it all. She said to herself she could not bear it. She would go home whatever happened; with Arthur or without Arthur. it did not seem to matter now.

CHAPTER VI.

NANCY had plenty of time to calm herself down before she received the promised visit of Mrs. Curtis. And Arthur, who had always been so anxiously compliant with all her wishes, and so ready to excuse all her shortcomings, looked so serious when she burst out into vituperation of the "big fat woman," and declared her determination not to be spied upon, that even her impetuosity owned a check.

"If you insist upon going away, and not receiving her, it will be a great vexation and pain to me," he said, "and your own good sense will show you, Nancy—"

"I have no good sense," said the excited creature. "I never pretended to be sensible; you knew what I was when

you married me, Arthur; and to be spied upon, and examined all over by a set of women—I can't bear it, and I won't, not for anybody in the world; not even for you!"

Poor Arthur did not make any immediate reply. He walked about the little room with agitated steps; then went and stood at the window, looking out with a blank and hopeless face. Perhaps silence was, of all others, the thing which Nancy could least encounter. She sat gazing at him, ready to make off in a moment to her room, to snatch her hat, and fly out, she knew not where; anywhere to escape from those shackles of her new life which were so intolerable. That he would rush after her, entreat her to return, promise everything that she wished seemed certain to Nancy. She did not calculate upon this, but was sure of it without thinking. But his silence chilled her, and when he spoke it was in a voice she did not recognise, a voice out of which all the music and sweetness seemed to have gone.

"I don't know if this will have any in-

fluence upon you," he said, "but it is worth thinking of: that we cannot live utterly estranged from my family. Some time or other we must seek a renewal of intercourse. *I* must seek it, not they; and if my Aunt Curtis could in the meantime convey a pleasant impression of you —if she was herself won to be on our side —I don't say it would be of great consequence, but yet it would be a beginning. I don't know what you think of my family, Nancy; if you think they are some kind of wild beasts to be avoided; but they can't be avoided. We shall have to live by them, and it is for our good—it is indispensable—that we should be friends."

"Friends!" cried Nancy, breathless with the effort of listening to him and keeping silence. "Then you may as well throw me over once for all, Arthur. Friends! with those that would take no notice of me—that never so much as named me in their letter."

"That was my fault—that was my fault," he said, turning round upon her. "I had no right to keep them in the dark.

I ought to have gone to my mother and told her, not kept everything in holes and corners."

"You were not a baby!" cried Nancy. "Why, you are four and twenty! Men don't go and ask their mamma's leave like girls."

"That may be—but neither do men throw all their relatives over; tear themthemselves apart from their family. And I will not do it," said Arthur with sudden self-assertion. "I will do anything in the world to please you but this. I will not quarrel with all who belong to me. As soon as I get an opportunity we must be reconciled to them—*must*, Nancy, there is no alternative. And why should you reject this easy way? My aunt is a kind woman. She will do us a good turn if she can. Try to please her, dear; won't you try to please her for my sake?"

Nancy had started to her feet, when he said with such energy that he would not do it: but something arrested her. Whether the reasonableness of it, which was not likely, or the new force and vigour with

which he spoke, or the pathos of the entreaty at the end, it would be difficult to say. But she was arrested, her attention caught, and the rush of her hasty blood restrained. After all, perhaps, there was something in what he said. It was not worth her while to fly from them—to avoid them as if she was afraid. But rather to show them her own superiority—to convince them that she was as good as they were, and had no occasion to fear them. This, perhaps, was scarcely the sentiment inculcated by Arthur's speech; but rather the turn it took in the alembic of her own mind, in which a hundred crude ideas were fermenting and getting fused daily. She sat down again after a moment, when he had ceased speaking. Arthur, notwithstanding his appeal, had excited himself too much to care precisely what she was thinking, and even this gave a wholesome stimulus to the turn in the tide of her thoughts. He did not care, but he should be made to care—he should be proud of her—he should feel that those people who slighted her were slighting something

above themselves. She would not yield so far as to say anything, to give her promise that she would endeavour to conciliate Mrs. Curtis. Not for her life; but what she said did not need to be any criterion of what she would do. She took up a book which happened to be on the table, and pretended to read it with an absolute absorption of interest which justified her silence; while he, on the other hand, having no certainty that he had moved her, but rather fearing the worst, kept pacing up and down between the window and the door, excited beyond the immediate question, having, for the first time, opened up the ultimate matter with himself. And when he once began to think of it, he could not shake off the idea. It was no question of expediency or possibility—a thing which ought to be done perhaps, yet might not. It seemed to him, thinking of it, that he must at once explain everything, and claim his forgiveness, and the reception of his bride. "I have done wrong—but it cannot be undone; nor is the wrong half so serious as you think."

This was what he must say. He had intended to write ever since he got to Paris, but had deferred it as an unpleasant business which might stand off from day to day. But now it appeared to him, all at once, that nothing was so important. Whatever else he did, he must reconcile himself with his father and mother, his own flesh and blood. If they would not, he must bear it; but nothing must be left undone on his part. This sudden conviction was brought upon him—was it by the sight of his relations—was it by Nancy's unreasonable and absurd antipathy to them? He could not tell—but the fact that he could think of any sentiment on Nancy's part as absurd and unreasonable showed what a leap he had suddenly made.

It was not till several hours later that Mrs. Curtis and her daughter appeared—for this time Mary had insisted upon coming, defying papa.

"We have done nothing but think of papa for the last three months," she said. "I think we may be allowed a little of our own way now."

Mary was very exact and particular, the essence of English duty and exact young-ladyhood. But there is a point at which duty and self-abnegation stop; and certainly, after spending three months at a German bath, a handmaiden to gout, it is not to be expected that the fortnight in Paris was to be spent in absolute devotion at the same gloomy shrine, especially as the General was better, and wound up for the year by all the sulphur he had imbibed. The young lady came accordingly with her mother, curious, and, indeed, eager to see how the successful competitor acquitted herself.

"Is she a lady?" Mary had said on the previous evening, cross-questioning her mother; but Mrs. Curtis had declined to commit herself.

"She said nothing but no, that I heard. How could I tell from a No?"

"I could have told if she had only coughed," Miss Curtis replied; and it may be supposed with what keen eyes she was prepared to investigate her new cousin. They were so late of coming that Arthur

had gone out, and Nancy, in her blue gown, sat by the fire alone just as the afternoon sank into twilight. They could not even see each other very clearly, and Nancy did not give them a very warm welcome. She stood up against the light, so that they could not make out a feature of her, and made them a stiff little bow, which was very awkward and self-conscious, yet not ungraceful. And then they seated themselves, not by Nancy's invitation. The log blazed up compassionately now and then on the hearth, and threw a gleam upon the three half-perceptible faces. It was a strange little scene in that genteel comedy which we call real life.

"I am sorry we are so late," said Mrs. Curtis. "We have been seeing our friends and making a few necessary purchases; and it is astonishing how trifles take up a winter's day; it is soon over at this time of the year. We have stayed longer than we meant to do in Germany, the weather has been so mild. I hope the General may be able to come to see you before we leave; but he has to take care

of himself just now, after his baths." As all this elicited no response, Mrs. Curtis continued. "Is Arthur out?"

"Yes." Nancy had intended to keep to her monosyllables, but it was difficult, and she added, in spite of herself, "I expect him back very soon; he thought it was too late for you to-day."

"I am so sorry; if he had been here he would have made us acquainted."

"On the contrary," said Mary, striking in, "I think, if Mrs. Arthur will not mind, it is better my cousin should not be here. Women understand each other better alone. Don't you think so? I feel sure of it, for my part."

"I don't know," said Nancy out of the partial gloom; and then there was a pause.

Mrs. Curtis made a fresh start, and the aspect of affairs was so strange, and the absolute passiveness of Nancy so apparent, that all polite feints were impossible, and the visitor plunged into the heart of the one subject, the only subject on which they could approach each other, feeling herself forced into it, whether she would or not.

"I hope you will not think what I am going to say intrusive; but may I ask if it is true that you have not seen anything of your husband's family, Mrs. Arthur—his immediate family, Lady Curtis, or Lucy, or any of them? Is it so indeed? But I hope you will do all you can to reconcile your husband with them. It cannot be good for you to be estranged."

"I know nothing about them," said Nancy, with a toss of her head.

"Indeed, I am very sorry for it. I think Arthur might have managed better. If he had played his cards rightly, when they saw it could not be helped they would certainly have yielded, and taken some notice of you."

"I wanted none of their notice," cried Nancy, crimson with anger; and then Mary interfered.

"Mamma, I don't think you are treating it in the right way," she said. "Mrs. Arthur does not know Aunt Curtis. Oh, what a pity that your people did not insist on seeing my aunt and uncle! that would have made everything easy. But I suppose you did not know."

"We did not care," said Nancy, growing hotter and hotter. She would make no other reply.

"But your people might have cared," said Mrs. Curtis, "as my daughter says. I hope you will not take it amiss if I say that there has been very great negligence somewhere; and you ought to do all you can to set things to rights. It is all settled now, and past changing. Don't you think that you should try to mend matters? Arthur may be very fond of you; I daresay he is. I am sure he has given good proof of it; but he cannot be happy separated from his family."

"Then he can go back to his family," cried Nancy, with flashing eyes, rising suddenly to her feet. "If you are specimens of his family, coming and abusing me like this, when you don't even know me—"

"I do not think, Mrs. Arthur, that you are taking what we say in a very friendly way. What object could we have in coming but to assist you—or rather Arthur—in the circumstances? For, of course, we

think most of him, it is only natural; and surely it is your duty to do what you can, as it is you who have brought him into trouble. It cannot be any offence to you to say as much as that."

"I wish you would go away," cried Nancy, hotly. "What have you to do coming here? only to tell me that I am in Arthur's way? How have I got him into trouble? Did I go and ask him to marry me? Did I make love to him? You think I am only a common girl, and you are ladies. Ladies! Do ladies behave so? —to bully a girl when she is by herself, when no one is by—a girl who has never done any harm to them, who is as good as they are?"

"Oh, this is too much," cried Mrs. Curtis. "I came to give you advice for your good—for Arthur's sake; and this is how you receive it! I wanted to help you if I could."

"I did not ask anyone's help," said Nancy, defiant, facing them, always with her back to the light, invisible except as a shadow. Her heart beat so that every

vein felt bursting. She had but one desire in her mind, and that was to rush off without stopping to see Arthur, without giving anyone the opportunity of insulting her further, and fly home as fast as the fastest train would carry her. What were the Curtises to Nancy? How could she bear this from anyone, to be schooled and dictated to, she who had never been scolded even at home, who had never been found fault with, whose whole being rose up in arms against anyone who ventured to criticise? There are people in all classes who are thus intolerant of a word, not to be interfered with, whom it is mortal offence to think less than perfect. She felt as if the blood in her veins had turned to fire.

"Mamma," said Mary, "Mrs. Arthur is quite right. We have no business to come here into her own rooms, and tell her what she ought to do. She knows better what to do than we can tell her. Why should you interfere?"

"Because Mrs. Arthur is young, and does not know, Mary, and it is her duty

to listen when one speaks for her good," said Mrs. Curtis, furious in her turn. "But you need not be afraid, I will not say any more. I will only bid you good morning, Mrs. Arthur. It is no object to me what you do, or don't do. If I could have smoothed matters I would; but I will not force my good offices upon you. I hope you will make your husband very happy, for otherwise I am sure he will be very miserable. He was always on such good terms with his family, and now you have made a complete breach."

"Will you go away?" cried Nancy, wild with anger.

She made a step forward with her arm lifted. It is not likely that any provocation would have made her strike; but if the two ladies, alarmed, thought she was about to do so, no one could blame them. This appearance of violence appalled them. Such a threatening aspect in a woman was so foreign to the customs of society, so tremendous a breach of all decorum, that actual blows would have had no greater effect upon them. They both retreated

before her, with alarm in their startled movements. Nancy could not see their faces, nor could they see hers.

"Indeed, we will go," cried Mrs. Curtis, with tones which were tremulous with wonder and anger, and the kind of moral fright which has been indicated.

Mary had got her hand upon the door to open it, when some one suddenly pushed in from outside, and Arthur came into the room.

"What is the matter?" he cried.

All he could see was his wife against the light of the window, threatening, with her arm raised as if in the act to strike.

"Oh, Arthur, stand between us and her!" cried Mrs. Curtis. "But I will not stay here another moment. Your wife has ordered us out. You poor boy, you can come to me if you like. Good-bye. I am very sorry for you; but I cannot stay another moment here."

"What is the matter?" he repeated, with a voice which was sharp and keen as a sword, as the two ladies disappeared hurriedly, and he stood alone opposite to

his wife, gazing at her with eyes that blazed through the gloom. Her hand had dropped by her side at his entrance, but at the sound of his voice Nancy, who was beside herself with passion, raised it again and shook it at him in speechless excitement, then turned and fled into her own room, clashing the door behind her. He heard her lock it in her rage, panting for breath as she dashed away. Poor Arthur! he had no mind to follow her. She might have spared herself that precaution. He stood upon the hearth, looking mournfully into the big mirror, in which he could see himself a shadow in the surrounding gloom. Had not all life turned into a vision of shadows, everything that was lovely and fair disappearing from about him? There seemed no power in him to do anything. To go after his aunt and endeavour to make up for his wife's incivility, was as impossible as to go after that wife and demand the meaning of her strange conduct. He had no heart for anything. He stood, as it were, amid the ruins of his bridal happiness, everything

crumbling about him. Only to-day, only a few hours ago, she had stood by him, beguiling him with sweet smiles and caresses, she who this minute had confronted him like a fury, with her hand clenched, threatening violence. He had borne a good many shocks in this eventful fortnight; the bloom had been taken off his fond fancy of perfection in his bride. But this was the climax of all. It seemed to take at once his strength and his hope away.

Meanwhile Nancy, her blood boiling, her countenance flushed, her eyes fiery with passion, had rushed out of the darkness into the soft light of her room, where the candles had been lighted, and where she saw herself entering like a fury in the great glass which was opposite to her as she rushed in. This sight made her pause in spite of herself; it sobered her all at once. Was that the aspect she had borne to these strangers? to her husband? The sudden shock of her own appearance had more effect upon her than any amount of moral reprobation. She calmed down in a moment. They had insulted her, she tried to say to herself; but what would

they think of her, was what conscience said in her. What would they think of her?—and Arthur? The colour went out of the foolish creature's face; a chill came over her. Oh, what was she to do, what was she to do? She had meant to impose upon them, to be more ladylike, more calm, more chilly in her politeness than anyone could be; and this was what it had come to. She threw herself down by her bedside in a passion of tears and penitence. Had Arthur come to her then, she would have thrown herself at his feet and asked his pardon; but Arthur was kept from her by the bolt she had herself drawn in her fury, and by—though this she was unaware of—the despair and dismay in his heart. She threw herself on the carpet, and found relief in a torrent of tears. Such tears! hot as her passion, overwhelming as the impulses that surged after one another through her heart. He must hear her sob, she felt, in the *abandon* of her misery; and though Nancy did not sob to be heard, it gave her a flutter of hope to think that he must hear her, and must come to know what it was, to com-

fort her, even to scold her, it did not matter, so long as he came. But not a sound except those sobs of hers broke the silence. The candles burned softly, and glimmered in the mirror, which reflected her lying there upon the flowery whiteness of the carpet, a dark miserable figure; but there was no tap at the door, no voice asking for admission. After a little time, her passion being spent, she raised herself up, and without drying the tears from her woebegone countenance, or arranging her disordered hair, opened the door softly, and looked into the sitting-room where she had left him. All was changed there; the candles were lighted, the fire re-made, the room full of warmth and light; but no Arthur. It was vacant, put in good order by the servants, who knew nothing about what had been happening there. And Arthur was gone. Where had he gone? Had he followed those women, who were his relations, though they were her enemies? Was he hearing their story, who doubtless would paint her as a very devil of ill-temper and pride? Had he gone over to the other side, he who was the cause of it

all? Her eyes began to flash again, and her veins to refill with that fire which had all but died out of them. She went back to her room, and dipped her burning forehead into water, and smoothed her hair, which she had pulled out of place with her passionate hands. When she had done this she stood for a moment between the two rooms in the silence, alone, asking herself what she should do. Had Arthur gone from her? Would he not come back again? A speechless dismay took possession of her soul, followed by flashes of passion, and still deeper and deeper despondency. There was but one thing that it seemed possible to do, except flight, which she was not equal to at this dreadful moment, when she was not sure whether he had flown from her. If he had been in the next room she might have had strength to flee; but not with this uncertainty and dread in her mind whether he had abandoned her. There was but one thing in this tremendous emergency which she could do. Had she not promised to him to write to his mother? She would do this now.

CHAPTER VII.

THIS period of early winter was a dull one at Oakley at all times. From October to Christmas it was not the custom of the family to invite the usual country-house array of defence against dullness. For some weeks after the partridge-shooting began there would be visitors about—luncheons at the coverside, dinners more or less sleepy, evenings more or less gay. And again at Christmas there was always a large party assembled; but between whiles the family were left to their own resources. How Sir John himself filled up his time was a profound and solemn mystery, which no one could entirely unravel. He spent it mostly in his library—in the perusal of Blue books, in

the writing of letters, and in something which was called business, and supposed to be the management of his estate; but everybody who knew Sir John knew that there was not very much beyond the most ceremonial portion of a sovereign's duty in his easy lot. The estate had been carefully managed all his life, by the most careful and sensible of functionaries, Mr. Rolt, who was the son of the last agent, and the brother of the solicitor at Oakenden who had the money matters of the family in his hands. And the family had been unexceptionable in its conduct for the last five-and-thirty years; there had been no extravagant heir, no heavy jointure diminishing its resources. General Anthony, who had done very well for himself, was Sir John's only brother, the only other member of the family; and there had been nothing but unbroken respectability and discretion in the management of the finances of the house. The estate ran upon wheels, or upon velvet, and all but managed itself. Then as for Parliamentary business and the Blue books, Sir

John was a sound reliable Conservative, who never dreamed of opening his mouth in the House. He voted as his leaders voted, who were the best able to judge, and the study of public affairs, to which he thus devoted himself, had all the merit of disinterestedness. It cannot even be said that it told greatly when he sat upon a Parliamentary committee, for he was apt to get confused on the points he knew best, and his knowledge did not stand him in stead at the moment it was wanted, as knowledge ought to do; but still what with the Blue books and the estate, he thought himself very fully occupied, and what could be desired more than this? Two or three times in the day, especially when it rained, he would come into his wife's morning room, and stand up with his back to the fire and talk, sometimes relevantly, sometimes irrelevantly, like most other people. But he was always serious, whether relevant or not. He had a long face, with grey whiskers and grey hair, and a long upper lip shutting close upon the under, which was feeble, though the

chin too was rather long. His face in these wintry days, when there was no news of Arthur, was as serious as a countenance well could be. Whether he was talking of his son or not, Arthur was always more or less in Sir John's mind, and never smile, or glimmering of a smile, approached within a hundred miles of the serious lines of that long upper lip.

Lady Curtis was of a different disposition altogether. The last extremity of grief even could not produce in her the monotony of melancholy which was possible to her husband. She would weep as he never wept; but then she would laugh also in sheer impatience of the weight of tedium and sameness. Her suffering was far more acute than his steady dullness; but it was broken by gleams of activity, by sudden impulses, by perpetual changes. She flung herself into her housekeeping, stirring up all the quiet corners, and making a commotion in the servants' hall, such as for some time threatened the family peace—and into the parish, where Lucy did not always want her mother's

assistance. She wrote letters to her friends, half cynical, half sorrowful, and more than half amusing, in which Arthur indeed was never referred to; but where many a cutting sentence, sharp jest, or mocking reflection betrayed that sting of personal suffering which those who knew her best could read between the lines. Lady Curtis was clever. She wrote articles now and then in literary papers, even sometimes in magazines; but this was an indulgence of which she was not proud, and she prudently kept silence about it, being wise enough to know that any such crown of wild olive sits badly upon the matronly brow of a country lady, alarming some people, and giving to others occasion for ill-natured jibes and pleasantry. Not her husband certainly, and even not Lucy knew always when she took upon herself the office of critic; and the able editor who printed her reviews was not aware what had made his contributor more industrious than usual and more bitter. It was Arthur that pointed the clear steel of those polished little arrows which she

discharged at the world. She did it as a relief to herself; but not that anyone might know. And it must be added that there was a certain satisfaction in this safety valve. Then there was crewel work, and the patterns of the Art Needlework Society, of which, however, she soon got tired. Altogether Lady Curtis's activity was stimulated to its utmost. She had the happiness of discovering a source of waste in the house, and an abuse in the parish; and she fell upon a nest of foolish books to criticize, and began a series of papers upon "The Minor Morals of Society;" and she set vigorously to work upon a set of curtains in a bold and effective pattern of her own invention. And thus she beguiled away the weary days.

Lucy was less difficult perhaps than either her father or her mother. She was young, and it still seemed to her that in the course of nature everything that was amiss must come right, and every breach be mended. Sir John's opinion was that nothing would ever mend, and his

wife's that the only thing to be done was to keep yourself busy, and persuade yourself that there was no hope nor expectation of any change within you. But Lucy waited with as much patience as she could, crying sometimes over the estrangement of her brother, but with no despair in her; things would come right, nay, must come right some time or other. To suppose that you could be separated for ever from anyone who belonged to you, anyone you loved! could there be folly in earth so great as that? It was a question of time, and the time was long and dreary and hard to support; but yet by and by *of course*, who could doubt it? everything would be well. November and December are dreary months, let us make the best of them, and very dreary in the country when the day is over by four o'clock or little after, and there are hours upon hours to be got through in-doors, in a big empty house, pervaded everywhere by that sense of the absent which is so much more urgent and all-prevailing than any presence. When Arthur had been at home

his being there was a matter of course, and no one thought much about it; but when Arthur was away! and away in this dismal manner, absorbed into another life, disjointed from theirs. Such an argument as this might make the dullest feel the superiority of an idea to all that is solid and practical. In her own room, which Arthur rarely entered, Lucy missed her brother, and she missed him going about the parish, where he never went with her. And Sir John missed him in the midst of those Blue Books at which the boy had made grimaces from a distance, but which he never approached; and Lady Curtis felt his absence when she wrote for her Review, though Arthur was the last person in the world to know anything of Reviews. This is at once the desolation and the power of death which fills our very atmosphere and daily breath with those whom it removes out of our sight for ever; and this it was that gave force to the words which both father and mother said of Arthur when he forsook them. It was as if he had died.

The ladies of the family spent most of their time, as has been said, in the morning room, with its two tall windows looking out from between the pillars of the façade. The drawing-room, which was large and splendid, too fine and too big to be cosy in, suffered in consequence, and except when the house was very full, had much the air of an uninhabited place. The morning room was fine enough, too fine most people thought now-a-days. Lady Curtis was one of the people who most feel the influence of those successive waves of taste which sweep across the mind of the most cultivated portion of society from time to time. Had it been necessary to refurnish this favourite room, she would have done it in the style of Queen Anne, with neutral tints and "flatted" colour, tiled fireplaces and high mantel-tops. And she was by times a little uncomfortable about the florid effect of her *Louis Quinze* decoration; but there was no excuse for remodelling the pretty room which the children loved. It was florid, there could be no doubt. The cornice

was rich with stucco wreaths, and there were Cupids about, and lyres and knots of ribbon, and glowing garlands of flowers. The carpet was white Aubusson with a great bouquet in the centre, as flowery and brilliant as that which had made Nancy happy in Paris. Lady Curtis's writing table was a *bonheur de jour* of the finest workmanship, and various articles of precious marqueterie stood about, flowery and dainty. Two robust gilt Cupids supported the white marble of the mantelpiece, and the satin curtains were looped and fringed, and festooned with the most elaborate art. Lucy sat and knitted stockings for the village children upon a satin sofa, with her warm wool in the drawer of an inlaid table with curved legs, which was worth half as much as the village. Everything in the room was framed on the principle of being beautiful, not for convenience or comfort, which is supposed to be the inspiration of various other styles of household decoration, but for beauty alone. And perhaps it was more suitable for the home of a bride, such as Lady

Curtis had been when she collected all those pretty things about her, than for the centre of household life which it had become; though indeed it was very doubtful whether Lady Curtis, a clever, impatient-minded woman, had ever attained any ecstacy of happiness as the bride of good Sir John. She loved her dainty surroundings better now than she did when they were in all their freshness. She was aware of her husband's steadfast goodness and truth, though he was not lively and amusing, and had more respect for him, and, at the same time, a tenderer sentiment for the father of her children than, perhaps, she had entertained for the good, dull bridegroom to whom she had been bound, not entirely, report said, with her own freewill. Therefore, perhaps, the beautiful room had never enshrined that impersonation of happiness, luxury, and splendour to whom all these decorations belonged by nature. Now-a-days, certainly, it was not any luxurious leisure and blessedness that dwelt there; but care and doubt, such

as would have been consistent with very sombre surroundings. Lucy sat and knitted, her mind wandering after Arthur, trying to imagine the brightest winter weather in Paris, and her brother enjoying himself, instead of the rainy skies here, the muddy roads and grey miserable day. Lady Curtis was in her chair by the window for the sake of the light, busy with her crewels.

"They may say what they like about the higher art of these subdued tints," she said, "but nature is not subdued in her tints. How am I to do the autumn leaves in those tones of colour? They are high and bright in nature." She said this, but she was thinking of Arthur all the time; and by and by Sir John came in from the library, and strolled up to the fire.

"Have not you had tea yet?" he said, putting himself in front, between the Cupids. "I thought you must be having tea. What a dreary afternoon it is! and the hounds are out. They must be having a disagreeable run." Thus he discoursed

with his lips; but in his heart his thoughts were of Arthur too.

"Lucy has been in the village, though it has been so wet. She says there is a very sad commotion going on. Young Jack Hodge, the blacksmith's son—tell your papa, Lucy," said Lady Curtis with a sigh.

"I don't think it is so very bad," said Lucy, getting up to make the tea which had just been brought in. "And I am sure papa will not think so; but his mother is making a great fuss. She has got the Dissenting minister over from Oakenden to comfort her; and to hear him speak, you would think it was very bad indeed."

"What has happened," said Sir John, "and why did not Bertie go?"

"Oh, Bertie, papa! what is the good of Bertie? There is a look in his nose as if he smelt something disagreeable whenever he goes into one of the cottages. The people cannot put up with it, and why should they? I think the Dissenter was better on the whole. Jack has gone for

a soldier, that is all. I tried to say there was nothing so very dreadful in that; but they would not listen to me."

"That is all the fault of your Dissenters," said Sir John, "why shouldn't the lad go for a soldier? They would do away with poor people altogether, these Dissenters if they could—and soldiers too I suppose. They would leave us all defenceless, at the mercy of anybody that chooses to make a run at us. They never have anything themselves. I suppose that is the reason why."

"Well, that is not bad logic," said Lady Curtis, "I suppose they think those who have something to lose should defend themselves;" and she sighed again, thinking, where was the son of her own house, who was its natural defender? He was worse than Jack Hodge, who, at least, might be of use to his country even if he did break his mother's heart.

"You mean the Volunteers?" said Sir John, "but I never believed in the Volunteers. It is all very well to let them amuse themselves, soldiering. And, perhaps,

in the country where they would be officered by the gentlemen they know," he continued after a moment's pause, with again Arthur, and not the Volunteers, in his thoughts, and echoing his wife's sigh. "they might be of some use; but I don't put any faith in them for the defence of the country. Thank you, my dear; on a wet afternoon like this one is glad of a cup of tea."

Sir John was generally glad of his cup of tea, if not for one reason, then for another, because it was wet, or because it was cold, or because it was sultry and stifling, or else for no reason at all. It formed a break in the long afternoon when there was nothing more interesting to do. For as he stood with his back to the fire, and his cup in his hand, he went on dully talking, as was his way.

"It is the very essence of democracy you know—when you substitute what they call the citizen soldier, the man that is supposed to fight in his own defence, for the soldier that is paid for defending us: the very essence of democracy—it makes

out that one man is just as good as another and that the Hodges want as much taking care of as you and I."

"So they do surely, papa," said Lucy, "their lives are as precious to them as ours are—to us."

"You don't know anything about it, Lucy; they are not half so important to the country, and it's the country we ought to think of first," said Sir John. "Without an army where should we be? The throne would have no authority—Volunteers mean democracy, my dear."

"And Jack Hodge is your true patriot," said his wife.

"Exactly so. I will tell his mother that is my opinion the next time I am in the village. A foolish woman with her Dissenters to put nonsense into her head. What could the boy do better. But Bertie ought to have been there? Bertie ought to have gone," said the Baronet. "I allow there are bad smells in the cottages, Lucy; but surely, if I can bear it, he ought to bear it; and you, you never say anything about the smells—I don't think

Bertie can be doing his duty as a clergyman ought. The young men of the present day are beyond me," Sir John added with another sigh; and he put down his cup with a dreary shrug of his shoulders, and shook his grey head as he went slowly away.

How glad they all were when the long November day was over, and they could shut out the ceaselees drip-dripping of the rain, the sweep of the dead leaves across the windows! The autumn had been mild, and the foliage had lasted longer than usual. Now it came tumbling down with every breath, with every drop of rain, choking up the paths, and filling the air with the mournfullest downpouring of yellow. On such a day no one came up the avenue, unless it was a draggled villager bound for the servants' door, or the Rector, or the Doctor, neither of whom contributed much to the gratification of the house; and to look out upon the misty vista of the spectral trees, the damp rising from the ground and falling from the skies, both of which were about the same

colour, for even a short November day is not cheerful to the spirits. It was a relief when the house began to be dotted with lamps, when the shutters were closed and the curtains drawn. Lady Curtis, for some time, had not cared to have the shutters of her favourite room closed till bed-time. She did not give any reason for this fancy, but Sir John had found fault with it, and she had yielded. "It was not safe," he said, "to leave the lower windows open. Some one might get in and frighten the house, if no more." Lady Curtis had not stood out. She watched the servant close them with again a lingering sigh. She had meant nothing by having them open. No, nothing. Only if such a thing might happen as that—any one—moved by some impulse of the heart, should suddenly come home—why, then there would be a little light visible from the very end of the avenue to encourage him. Nothing was more unlikely than that such a thing should happen. But still granting that the impossible did sometimes come when no

one expected it, then there might be use in the light. But as nobody could explain this, or say anything in defence of so painful a notion, of course it was done away when Sir John objected. My Lady sat in the gilded chair, cushioned with satin, that stood by the fire, and took a last look of the dull twilight with the trees looming through it like ghosts, as the footman began to shut up. It had been a dreary day; it was more agreeable to turn to the clear light of the lamp within, the subdued glimmer of the satin hangings, the sparkle of the fire. The day was done at last.

And yet it was a little dreary, also, to think of the hours that remained unaccomplished—the long still evening in which there would be a little talk, very little, and the routine of dinner to go through, and the still evening after, which Lucy and she would spend together. Perhaps she would work, and Lucy read aloud; or Lucy would take to one of her many undertakings, which were of a homelier kind than Lady Curtis's crewels, while her mother wrote. The house was very still, as

it became a great house to be, lying folded in the darkness, in the great park, in the humid lawn and clouds of watery trees, without one gleam from all the windows in front to welcome anyone who, unexpected, might come out of the busy world to explore the stillness—the most unlikely thing in the world to happen; yet such things had been and, who could tell? might be. There was one event still possible, and that was the coming in of the post, which arrived after dinner, a most inappropriate moment, everybody said. Indeed, Sir John had often proposed not to send for the letters, but to leave them, when there were any, till next morning, rather than spoil the digestion of the family at such a moment. But Lady Curtis had a woman's liking for letters, and never would hear of this. She had no experience of the letters which spoil digestion. Her milliners' bills were no trouble to her. She had never been in debt, it is to be supposed, in her life, neither were there mysteries in her existence which she was afraid of; her letters

were pleasant breaks upon the monotony, enriching the quiet of her country life; therefore she would have the post-bag brought up, whatever Sir John might say.

And that night there were two letters that seemed to wake up even in the house itself something like the heart-beating that flutters in an individual bosom at sight of a long-expected communication—two letters which bore the Paris post-mark, one to my lady, one to Sir John. The butler saw them at the first glance, recognising the writing of one, guessing at the other. He whispered to the housekeeper, before he went to my lady's room with her share of the budget.

"Summat from Mr. Arthur," he whispered in her ear.

"Oh, let me look," she said.

It was something to see, even the outside of the letters; and they looked at each other across that other one, and agreed in their guess as to what it was. Daly, the butler, was a man of discrimination. He knew, as well as she did, that, whereas Sir John was equally dull at all times, my

lady expected the post with a thrill of nervous anxiety every night. He knew it by her eyes, by the clutch of her hand at the letters, by the inspection, quick as lightning, which she gave them, always curbing her disappointment. This was why Daly carried my lady's letters the first especially to-night.

CHAPTER VIII.

"LUCY, Lucy!" said Lady Curtis in a stifled voice.

It was the postmark, the thin paper of the foreign letter, the stamp of the hotel which had caught her eye; and it had not occurred to her as she opened the envelope that it was not Arthur's handwriting. Indeed, Nancy had been copying Arthur's handwriting, and had partially succeeded in making her own like his, at least for the length of the address. When she called to Lucy, it was that she had perceived the different writing, the unexpected form of address within, and had jumped at the conclusion that something had happened to Arthur, and that it was his servant who was writing. Lucy rushed to

her, seeing her agitation, and coming behind her, read over her shoulder the letter which Lady Curtis threw an alarmed glance over, trembling in every limb. They trembled, both of them, with excitement as they went on. It was not what they expected; it was neither a letter from Arthur, nor yet an announcement of his illness, but something else, which they had not anticipated or thought of. It was the letter Nancy had written in hot haste and desperation, after the visit of Mrs. Curtis had come to so violent and sudden an end. My lady read it, the paper trembling in her hand, and Lucy read it over her shoulder, with painful, suppressed exclamations. This is what Nancy had said:—

"My Lady,

"Arthur says I am to write to you, though I do not know why; and I have told him I will, if I may say what I like and not show it to him. So you will know, if you are offended, that he has no hand in this. I am to say, I suppose, that I am sorry, though why I cannot tell. I

did not think about you when I consented to marry Arthur? Why should I? In our class of life we don't think that a young man's mother has any right to interfere. I never thought of you, therefore I maintain I have nothing to be sorry for about you. I have enough to do to please my own father and mother; why should not he manage his as I did mine?

"And since we were married, what did I owe to you? You never did anything for me. You wrote to him, or you made Miss Lucy write to him on our wedding-day, and never once named me. You knew I would be his wife before he got it, but you never named me. Was that a way to make me wish to please you? And the best I could do was never to think of you at all. Was not that as good as putting him against me, never to mention my name on my wedding day? And why should I write to you now? You are old, and I am young. You ought to be the one to come and to say you are sorry. I am your son's wife; therefore, I am as good as you are, whatever I may have been

before; and I was an honest girl before, and as good as anybody. Why didn't you come then, and make up to *me?* It is old people who ought to show an example to the young, not young people to the old.

"Now that I have said this, I will just warn you that if you try to make Arthur think badly of me, to separate him from me (which you can't do, however you may try), that I will keep him separate from you. If you are fond of him, you will have to be civil to me, you and Miss Lucy, grand ladies though you are. You think me no better than the dirt below your feet; but if you do not treat me as I ought to be treated, I will keep Arthur from you, so that you shall never see him again. I have the power to do it, not like you, who have no power. He can do without his mother, but he can't do without me. I think it is honest to tell you this, because he insisted I was to write to you—I shouldn't have written to you of myself—and because I mean to come back home to England and settle at Underhayes, to be near my people, who have always been

(not like you) kind to him as well as to me. So that now, my lady, you know exactly what I mean, you and Miss Lucy, and what I will do.

"ANNA FRANCES CURTIS."

Lady Curtis was flushed and agitated; her eyes blazed hotly over her crimson cheeks.

"Was ever anyone so insolent?" she said, and bit her lip to keep from crying, altogether overwhelmed by the unexpected insult.

"Oh, mamma, the girl does not mean it!" cried Lucy, distressed, trying to take the letter. It was bad enough to read it once, but to read it as she knew her mother would do, over and over again, feeling the enormity ever greater, would be terrible. Lucy put out her hand for it, to take it away.

"I will not give it you, Lucy. I know what you mean to do; to put it in the fire that I may forget it, and think it is not half so bad."

"No, mamma; but why should you

dwell upon it? She wrote it hastily. See, there is haste in every line; but we will read it at leisure, and go over it again and again. She is so uninstructed, so inexperienced; and there is a kind of savage justice in it, if you will but think, mamma."

"How dare you say so?" cried Lady Curtis, in whose mind the immediate pain and hurt received were too violent to be thus smoothed away, and who was as little able for the moment to inquire into the absolute justice of the matter as Nancy herself. The tears began to glisten in her eyes, tears of genuine suffering. "This is what our children bring us," she said; "they for whom we are ready to make any sacrifice—insult, the flaunting in our face of some poor creature, surely, surely not worth as much as his mother was to him, Lucy; not worth you—*you*, my child; of that I may be sure at least; and his home, and all that was worth having in life—"

And some scalding drops fell on her hands in a hot and sudden shower. Tears do not last at Lady Curtis' age; they cost too much; only a sharp stab like this

could bring them, hasty and unwilling, from her eyes.

"I know it is hard, very hard; but, mamma—"

Lucy was interrupted by the sound of her father's heavy step approaching the room. He threw the door open and came in hastily. He, too, had a letter in his hand, and held it out to his wife as he came forward.

"He has written at last," he said. "It is a fine thing to have waited so long for. Look, Elizabeth, if you can read it, what your boy says."

Lady Curtis took the letter, looking anxiously at her husband's face to read its effect. And then Lucy and she read it as they had read the other, the girl over her mother's shoulder. The very sight of Arthur's handwriting moved them. He had written a few words to Lucy to thank her for the money and the blessing conveyed to him on his wedding day; but except these few warm words they had not heard from him since that painful violent letter which Lady Curtis had re-

ceived after the visit of Mr. Rolt, the family lawyer, to Underhayes. And that had given the ladies so much pain that the very sight of the dear and familiar handwriting brought it back. Sir John went to the fire as was his way, and set himself up against the mantelpiece, turning towards them the dullness of his long melancholy countenance, which showed little change of expression one way or another. His heavy repose, not unclouded with trouble, contrasted sharply with the eager and anxious looks of his wife and daughter already disturbed and excited. They read, breathless with anxiety and haste, flying over the paper, taking in its meaning almost at a glance in a way which was wonderful to him. He shook his head slightly as he saw this rapid process; it was impossible they could understand it, he said to himself; even Arthur's letter! skimmed over with feminine want of thoroughness in anything, as if it had been a book.

Arthur's letter, so far as external forms went, was dutiful enough.

"My dear father,

"You may think that I ought to say something about the long break in my letters, and I am aware that it would not be without reason; but what am I to say? My marriage was really a thing which concerned me most. I would have been ready to make any apologies for the indiscretions with which it was accompanied, and for the fundamental mistake of not having explained my wishes and intentions to you from the first. But that is too late now, and you must permit me to say that the strange step you yourself took in sending Rolt to Underhayes to interfere in my business, justifies the silence in which I have taken refuge since, as being more respectful to you than anything I can say. I trust and desire to believe that the extraordinary proposals made by him did not emanate from you; nothing indeed but the mind of a pettifogging attorney could have suggested such means of endeavouring to outwit and frustrate an honourable attachment. I can never meet with civility the originator

of these proposals, and it is a desire to say nothing on the subject which has kept me silent even to you.

"I now write about a serious matter which it is necessary to call your attention to. The allowance which was ample for me at Oxford, or when I was in another condition of life, is naturally quite inadequate to the expenses of a married man. My wife and I are about to return to England, and at her desire we will proceed at first to Underhayes, where her family reside. Our plans are not yet decided; but the first requisite for any arrangement is to know exactly by what degree you may be disposed to increase my income, in order that I may be able to provide for the increased expense to which I am now subject. We have been in Paris some weeks, and had it not been for the succour which my mother's generosity provided me, I do not see how I could have afforded to my wife all that it was indispensable my wife and Sir John Curtis's daughter-in-law should have. These of course are extraneous expenses; but I

must request that you will kindly come to a decision about my present income with as little delay as possible. This is doubly important, as we shall thus only be able to make up our minds on what scale of living it will be proper for us to make our start.

"My wife desires her respects to my mother, Lucy, and yourself.

"Affectionately,

"ARTHUR CURTIS."

"And this is all!" said Lady Curtis, throwing it on the table with a mixture of scorn and grief; "in so short a time how well she has tutored him. Oh don't say anything, Lucy! I can see that girl's hand in every word; and this is all!"

"Surely it is all," said Sir John, "you don't think I would keep back anything, why should I? It's all, and enough too, I think. A fellow like that whom we've all petted and spoiled, thinking of nothing but his allowance! It's disappointing, that it certainly is. When one thinks that's Arthur!" said his father, his lower

lip quivering with unusual emotion, yet something that was intended for a smile.

"Oh don't make him out any worse than he is," said Lady Curtis, "I can see that girl's hand through all."

Now a more gratuitous assertion than this could not be. Arthur had written when away from Nancy altogether in the writing room of the English Club. She had known nothing about what he was doing, and still less did she know that he had made up his mind not to struggle with his fate any longer, but to let her go back to her congenial soil, which would secure at least no further encounters with people of his own class, even when met in the recent accidental way. He could not, he felt, risk anything like this again. He had not strength for it. It was better to yield to her than to wear himself out with such paltry miseries; but up to this moment even Nancy herself did not know of his decision. Lady Curtis however did not know this, nor did the despair in Arthur's mind ever occur to her, or the state of severance between him and his wife

which had really existed when these two letters were written. It seemed to her that they were full of one spirit, and that Nancy had got the entire command and put her own unregulated soul into her husband. Dear as he was to his mother, the bold figure of this girl whom she had never seen, seem to rise up and obliterate her son before Lady Curtis's eyes—obliterate him intellectually and morally—so that all she saw was a shadow of Nancy, not the reality of Arthur. Sir John did not take this figurative view. He took what he saw for granted, exercising no spirit of divination. He was wounded not to sharp pain like his wife, but with a heavy sense of evil. This was all Arthur wanted, not to be his father's right hand man, to help him (for, privately, Sir John was of opinion that he had a great deal to do) to become the real head of the estate, understanding everything as his father had wished; but only to have his allowance increased! that was all. It did not give Sir John a less pang in his matter of fact way than it did his wife, but this was

the low level of interpretation by which he explained to himself the boy who had been his pride.

As for Lucy, she read the two letters with a double distress, as seeming to see something in both of them which escaped her parents. She thought it was because she was young, and in sympathy with these two foolish, erring, unkind, young people, that she was able to read between the lines and see that they were not so unkind as they seemed. There was, as she had said, a kind of savage justice in Nancy's letter from Nancy's point of view, and insolent though it was, Lucy felt that she could understand it, and could excuse it though it was inexcusable. And as for Arthur's cold interestedness and apparent indifference to everything, was not this only a sign of mortal pain, a proof that he felt himself in a position from which he could not recede, which he dared not discuss or enter into? "Oh," she cried in the tumult of feeling which rose within her, "do not take it all for granted like this. Arthur is not what you think him,

papa. He feels it, oh, I know he feels it to the bottom of his heart; but how can he discuss it, how can he open such a subject with us? She is his wife, and she knows what we think of her."

"Oh, Lucy, hold your peace," cried Lady Curtis, whose heart was wrung to breaking, "what is the use of this casuistry, as if you knew him better than we do. No, I cannot shut my eyes to the truth whatever you may do; this boy for whom we have done so much, whom we have brought up so carefully, finds something more congenial in low society than in ours. It is unworthy of us to groan over such a preference. See, he avows it. He is going back to that wretched place, to the society of his wife's relations. We ought to be proud," said Lady Curtis with her eyes flashing, with a miserable make believe of a smile on her lips, "that is what he likes best, *my* boy!"

"Oh, mamma, don't be so hard upon him."

"So hard, am I hard? upon Arthur! God help me! I wish I could be a little

harder; I wish I could think as little of him as he does of me or of what I feel," cried Lady Curtis with a moan in her broken voice. Sir John did not show so much emotion. He stood gazing dully before him, not even looking at them, his eyes fixed upon vacancy; but many thoughts were revolving dully in his oppressed spirit too.

"Now that he has written to me like this, he shall be attended to," said Sir John, "since he wants nothing but money, he shall have his money, and I will wash my hands of him. People do not spend a great deal in that rank of life do they? If that is how he is going to live, he must be provided for accordingly. I will speak to Rolt about it to-morrow. You see how he speaks of poor Rolt, a most meritorious man, that has no thought except our interest. And if it had not been that Arthur got hold of it before he ought to have known, Rolt would have bought the girl off and freed us. Ah, yes—Rolt is the best man of business, and the most considerate family friend I know."

"But it was a dreadful thing to do; to buy her off! If you will think of it, papa, and think who she was, the girl whom Arthur *loved*. It does not matter," cried Lucy with generous heat, "that we do not like her or approve of her. Arthur loved her; and this girl whom he loved so much, whom he thought more of than any one in the world, to be bought off!"

"Ay, that's it," said Sir John, "it would have all gone on smoothly if he had not broke in with his high flown ideas just like you; the thing would have been done but for that; and he would have been clear of her. But now that it's come to this he shall have what he wants, and he shall have what he's entitled to. I will see Rolt to-morrow," said Sir John, never changing the dull fixedness of his eyes.

And it may be supposed that the remainder of the evening was not very cheerful. Lady Curtis locked both the letters up in a drawer of her writing-table. "It is a pity they should be separated, these two," she said with that quivering

smile of scorn which is so bitter, more painful than weeping. Yes, this was what all their hopes had come to. Arthur her boy, had chosen his own path, and this was what it was, nothing in which his father or mother had any share. What he liked better was the coarse girl who had married him for all the advantages he brought in his hand, and who had infatuated him, and made him such a one as herself. The sense of failure was in Lady Curtis's mind, the pang of feeling that something inferior had been preferred to her, and to all that was worthy, by her boy. Can anything be more terrible than when father or mother is driven to despise the child of their bosoms? It happens often enough, and there is no such pang on earth. With trembling hands and this miserable quiver of a smile on her lip, she locked them away. Now surely it was time that they should rouse themselves, shake off the dull misery for Arthur's loss which had paralysed the house, and brood no more over the desertion of one so unworthy their love.

"We have enough of this," she said, "come, Lucy! I do not mean that your life should be spent in sackcloth because Arthur is unworthy. Because he is hob-nobbing with the tax-collecter, are there to be no cakes and ale in Oakley? We will send our invitations to-morrow," she said with a mocking little laugh of pain. Sir John opened his eyes a little at the levity of this unintelligible phrase about cakes and ale. But he had long ceased to criticise my lady whatever she might do or say. She had odd ways of expressing herself sometimes, but she was always to be trusted in the main points.

"I shall speak to Rolt to-morrow," he said for his part, which was more reasonable, as he went back to his room and resumed his Blue book. And he read till his usual hour, and lighted his candle exactly at the same moment as every other night, though his heart was heavy in his bosom like a lump of lead, not warming his blood as it ought to do. The ladies were not so reasonable, I need not say. They sat over the fire till it died out be-

tween them, neither of them remarking the blackness, or being aware that the cold they felt had anything to do with the external circumstances—talking it over and over, arguing, fighting even: Lucy taking the side of defence, while her mother darted arrows of bitter words at Arthur and the girl who had got such empire over him. Men do not make their miseries subjects of endless discussion like this, perhaps because two men are scarcely ever so much like the two halves of one soul as mother and daughter are; nor could any brother and father throw themselves wholly into such a question as the sister could do with the mother. Lucy fought for him, condemned him, justified him, all in a breath; and cried and struggled and held up Arthur's standard even while she threw herself with passionate sympathy into the proud and sore disappointment of the mother whose hopes had been thus deceived. They were still there over the dead fire in full tide when the solemn little stroke of one startled them, and drove them to their rooms,

chilled and miserable. How dark it was outside, the rain falling, the last leaves dropping, in the middle of the December night! It added a shivering of physical sympathy to eyes exhausted with crying and voices exhausted with talking over this ever expanding subject. Every thought and plan of the house had borne reference to Arthur for how many years; and this was how he dropped them, turned from them, threw himself upon the lower and baser elements of life.

CHAPTER IX.

ACCORDING to Lady Curtis's hasty resolution, the invitations, to some at least, of the ordinary Christmas party were for an earlier date than usual. The climax of the distress produced by Arthur had come, and though the struggle was hard to pick up the ordinary occupations of life again, and go on as if nothing had happened, at a time when Arthur's absence was so doubly felt and apparent, the impatient soul of his mother was better able to bear this variety of pain than the monotonous heaviness of the other, the dull presence of one thought that had been upon the house like bonds of iron. One of the first visitors who arrived was Durant, who had always been the first in

Arthur's time, next to the son of the house in familiarity and knowledge of everything and everybody about. Even during the miserable interval now passed, Durant's letters had given a certain solace to Lady Curtis, as furnishing her always with something to talk of, something to discuss with Lucy, to whom she would point out freely the weakness of his arguments which were always in Arthur's favour, and for which Arthur's mother loved him, even while she took a delight in demonstrating their futility. Lucy had a long round to make among her poor people on the afternoon on which Durant was expected. She could not have told why it was that she chose that special day; perhaps because it was fine, a simple reason, quite satisfactory to the ordinary intelligence; perhaps because the association of ideas with him, whom she had not seen since he took her to Arthur's wedding, was so painful that she was willing to postpone the meeting as long as possible; or perhaps she was desirous in Arthur's interest that Lady Curtis should

have her first conversation with his faithful friend undisturbed by any third person; or, perhaps, again Lucy had reasons of her own, into which none of us have any right to pry. She was for a long time at the almshouses, having started early to take advantage of the brightest part of the short winter day, and took her luncheon with Mrs. Rolt, the wife of the good agent, to whom the children at Oakley had been as her own since ever they were born. Mrs. Rolt had no children of her own, and she had as great a desire to talk about Arthur as his mother herself had. She plunged into the subject as soon as Lucy appeared, and there was nothing but sympathy and tenderness in the bosom of this simple-hearted retainer of the family, who was at the same time a far away cousin, and therefore on more familiar terms than are usually permitted to an agent's wife. This visit detained Lucy also, so that it was four o'clock, and the red winter sunset just over when she started to walk up the long avenue. Durant had been expected by an earlier

train at the station which was a mile or two off, so that Lucy felt herself safe. She set out upon her walk very full of a new incident which she had not previously heard of, the meeting between her aunt and her brother at Paris of which Mrs. Rolt had been informed by the Rector. "Why did not he tell us, or why did not Aunt Anthony write?" Lucy had said.

"Oh, my pet, what could she write? I don't suppose it was pleasant," Mrs. Rolt said, "however angry you may be with your own, you don't like to hear them blamed by others; and Mrs. Anthony has sense enough to know that."

"Then why did she mention it at all?" said Lucy.

"Oh, my love, that would have been more than flesh and blood is equal to. To have had an adventure like that, and not to have mentioned it at all! She said Mrs. Arthur behaved *dreadfully* to her, abused her, turned her out of her rooms. But we must take all that with a great many grains of salt, for you know your Aunt Anthouy, my dear."

"Yes, I know Aunt Anthony; but how dreadful it is that Arthur's wife—fancy, *Arthur's wife!*—should give anyone occasion to say that she behaved badly. You will not tell mamma?"

"No, indeed, I promise you; and I daresay, if we could know it all, the half isn't true. You mustn't worry about it, my darling," said Mrs. Rolt, kissing Lucy as she went away.

The girl shook her head. Why should they tell her such things if they meant her not to worry? and yet she was feverishly glad that she had been told, as people are in respect to every such family misery. She went in at the great gates, with her cheek still flushed by the agitation of the news. To hear that a friend, a member of the family, had actually met and spoken with Nancy, seemed to bring her nearer, to make her more real. And perhaps there was a personal advantage in this thrill of renewed agitation about Arthur, which replaced for the moment some of her own thoughts. For lo! it so occurred that all Lucy's precautions had been futile.

She had not walked half-a-dozen yards when she heard behind her the rattle of the dogcart swinging round the corner to the gate, that had been sent for Durant to the station; and before she had time to collect her thoughts, it drew up suddenly just behind her, and Durant himself sprung out of it, and in a moment was at her side. The dogcart went on with his portmanteau, and she felt herself exactly in the circumstances she had so elaborately avoided, bound, without chance of escape, to a long solitary walk through the still avenue, and a long confidential talk before he had seen anyone else, with her brother's friend.

"Yes, the train was late; there was some slight accident on the line, at which I have been fuming and fretting. But, as it happens, it has been a lucky detention," said Durant.

Lucy took no notice, not even so much as by a smile.

"You said you were very busy."

"Yes, I am getting plenty of work to do; not very distinguished work as yet, but I hope better may come."

"Your leading counsel will fall ill some day, and it will be a very interesting, romantic case, and you will be inspired to make the most eloquent speech, and your fortune will be made."

"I see you know how such things happen," he said with a laugh.

"Oh, yes, I have read a great many novels," said Lucy. "That is always how young barristers get on; and between that and the woolsack is but a step."

"A very long stride, I fear; but I do not insist on the woolsack," said Durant; and then there was a pause, and he said lower, "I saw Arthur a few days ago."

"Did you see him? Oh, Mr. Durant, you must not mind what mamma says. She has begun to jeer at him, and that is the worst of all. How was he looking? Poor Arthur, poor boy! And his wife—did you see her? Oh, I have been hearing such a story of her!"

"What story?" he asked anxiously.

He had heard many; but on the whole he was no enemy to Nancy. He saw the glimmer of tears in Lucy's eyes, and this

did much to steel his heart against Arthur's wife; but still he had no feeling against Nancy. He was ready even, more or less, to stand up in her defence.

"My aunt, it appears, saw her in Paris, Mr. Durant."

"Oh, it is Mrs. Curtis's story then?" he said.

"You speak as if there were a great many stories about her," said Lucy, with sudden heat.

"No; but one hears everything, you know, in town—especially, I think, at this time of the year, when there are few men about, and they talk of everything."

"Yes," said Lucy, "I have heard often of the gossip in your clubs, that it is worse and more unkind than any other gossip."

"Do not be too hard upon us! It is as petty and miserable as gossip is everywhere. But I have seen Mrs. Curtis, and heard it from herself. It is nothing, a misunderstanding between women—"

"Which, of course, you consider the merest trifle," cried Lucy, much more piqued by this countershot than he had

been by the assault on the clubs. Women are certainly on this point more ready to take offence than men, who have the calm confidence of their own superiority to fall back upon.

"I do not, indeed; but the women in question are not of the highest order. Mrs. Curtis most likely was fussy and interfering; and Nancy—"

"Do you call her Nancy?" cried Lucy, opening wide eyes.

"I beg your pardon. I got used to the name before she was Mrs. Arthur; and there is such a wonderful incongruity in the idea that she is Mrs. Arthur," he said, doing his best to conciliate by this remark; but this slip of the name had evidently had a bad effect, he could not tell why. He thought that Lucy (in whom he had never before seen any indication of such foolish family pride) was offended by such a familiarity; and yet what could he say to excuse it? "Mrs. Curtis was intrusive, probably," he went on, "and Mrs. Arthur resented it."

"Oh, do not change the name you

are accustomed to for me, Mr. Durant!"

"I am not accustomed to it," he answered meekly, feeling that something was wrong, but not knowing what it was. "She resented it, I suppose. I do not wish to be disagreeable, but you know that a lady like Mrs. Curtis can be very officious and interfering; and *she* resented it, I suppose."

Poor Durant! if he thought he was mending matters by calling Arthur's wife *she*, with that little emphasis, how mistaken he was! Lucy's heart was conscious of a thrill and jar, such as one's foot or hand might experience if suddenly striking against some sharp angle in the dark. She had no right to feel so unreasonably offended with Durant, so unreasonably disdainful of Arthur's wife. Lucy was angry with herself for the force of her sentiments, which seemed so utterly out of proportion with the matter on hand. She thought it more dignified and befitting to retire from any further question of it. But her aspect changed unawares, her very form grew stiffer and more erect, and she said, icily,

"You said you saw Arthur. Is he looking better than when we saw him last?"

"No," said Durant, hesitating; "I am not able to say that he is. I hope Lady Curtis will not ask me that question."

"Oh!" said Lucy, the tears springing to her eyes, "do you think I am not as anxious about my only brother—as concerned as mamma?"

"Indeed I do not mean anything of the kind; but I can speak to you more freely. *You* understand; you always did understand, Miss Curtis," he said, looking at her with a tender admiration which stole the hardness from Lucy's heart in spite of herself. "I do not know how it was. It is so natural that Lady Curtis—that all his family should see the folly and the unkindness of it most. But you always saw the whole—and understood."

"I never excused Arthur, Mr. Durant. No one could know the evil of what he has done—the pain it has produced so well as I."

"I know," he said softly, "all the more honour to your delicate heart that under-

stood. I beg your pardon—I was only speaking by way of explanation. I can speak to you as I cannot speak—to any one else. Arthur is not looking well, poor fellow—he is harassed and worried to death. All the glamour has gone out of his eyes, and he sees his wife's family now as other people see them, as very commonplace, sordid, uneducated people, with whom, or with their like, he has no affinity. I would not say even that he did not see this more deeply than—I do, for instance, who am quite indifferent. To me they seem good sort of people enough—in their way. But Arthur has the horror of feeling that they belong to him more or less—and that he is called upon to associate with them."

"Poor boy! oh, poor boy! and he was always so fastidious! But that is nothing, Mr. Durant—they do *not* belong to him. He can shake them off whenever he likes; but her—what of her? She is the chief person to be thought of," said Lucy, with a sigh that it should be so.

"This is precisely the thing which I

can say to you, and to no other," said Durant. "She is not the same as they are. If you could fancy one of the stories of a stolen child—that was always different, always superior to the children of the people who brought it up—"

"Superior—Aunt Anthony's story does not sound much like superiority! I think you are influenced, as they say gentlemen always are, by her good looks, and that is why you make an exception in favour of—my sister-in-law," said Lucy, with a sound in those words such as Durant had never heard before from her lips. He looked at her in the growing twilight with wonder and pain. Was his certainty of *her* superiority to every other person concerned, about to turn out vain? It was almost dark, and he could not make out the expression of Lucy's face; and of all things in the world the last that could have occurred to the young man was any thing to account for this, which should have been flattering to himself.

When he spoke again, there was some distress in his voice, and a half tone of

complaint. "I thought I might venture on saying this to *you*—I thought you would understand; the facts are all against her. I believe she has managed very badly; and allowed everybody to see her want of cultivation—her strange—ignorance. Nevertheless," he said earnestly, "I do not despair of Nancy. As for her good looks, they count for very little with me. What effect they may have on idle and unoccupied minds, I cannot pretend to say; but for a man like myself with a busy life and a pre-occupied imagination—"

"Oh, I beg your pardon, Mr. Durant," cried Lucy, "I did not wish to pry into your secrets."

She would not have said it had she taken time to think. What folly to let him know that she understood that enigmatical phrase about the pre-occupied imagination! Lucy went on, quickening her pace, feeling the glow of a sudden blush run all over her in the gathering dark. And the silence seemed to thrill about them with all manner of possibilities of what might be said next. They were as

much alone as if they had been in a desert island—bare trees standing closely about, the twilight all grey among the branches, the whole world still and listening. The thrill came to Lucy too, a kind of visionary tremor.

"Mamma will be looking out for you," she said, hurriedly. "She will scold me for keeping you so long walking, when you might have been there in the dogcart half an hour ago;" and she sensibly quickened her own pace.

But Durant did not share in that thrill. It affected him only with a contrary touch of despondency. Lucy's fright lest he should go on to tell her who it was who had pre-occupied his imagination (could she entertain any doubt who it was?) reflected itself in his melancholy sense that he dared not tell her any more. He dared not because he was poor, he who, even if he had been rich, would not have been thought her equal by anyone belonging to her; and because he was her father's guest, and incapable of betraying his hospitality by a word to his daughter which

Sir John would not have permitted. Thus that suggestion of self-disclosure ended in a blank silence which neither would break. He, too, quickened his steps to keep up with her, and in a few minutes they reached the house, which rayed out light into the darkness from the open door and windows. It seemed all bright, all open, full of hospitable warmth and radiance. When Durant had come here before, he had come with Arthur, and there had been a rush of mother and sister to the door to meet the heir of everything, the first thought and hope of all within these walls. Durant had been half-saddened many a time by that warm and exuberant welcome which Arthur always received. He himself had been received kindly too, but with what a difference! and as there was no particular enthusiasm about him in his own home, notwithstanding the fact that his family were indebted to him for everything, he had never been able to divest himself of a certain envy for Arthur. But he was a thousand times more saddened now to go up the great steps into the hall, and see

no mother hurrying out to receive her son, no Arthur coming with cheerful outcry, nothing but himself stealing in softly, half ashamed of being there without Arthur, half afraid to look at Lucy, who must feel it too, he felt. He did not know how to go on and meet Lady Curtis's eyes. He felt sure they must meet him with a reproach. "Where is Arthur?" he felt the very house say to him; and almost wished that he had been guilty, that he could have taken their reproaches to himself, and answered for his friend's sake, "It is my fault." He paused in the hall, and looked round wistfully at Lucy. Her eyes were wet, her lips faltering. She held out that hand to him.

"I know," she said; "but when we have got over the first, it will be almost as if he had come too."

"Almost!" he said shaking his head. He felt his eyes grow wet, and held her hand almost without knowing that he held it. Lady Curtis had heard the movement in the hall, though she had been trying not to hear it, and the shock had been broken to her by the arrival of the

dogcart which she thought was bringing him. She came out now hiding her agitation with a smile, and held out her hands. Neither of them could speak. But when they got into that room which had seen so many happy meetings, it was too much for Arthur's mother. She took hold of his arm convulsively with both her hands, and leaned her weight upon his shoulder and cried, "Oh, my boy!" through the sobs which she could not suppress. Durant was overcome at once by the emotion and the confidence. He stooped down with tender reverence and kissed her cheek.

"He is all the brother I have ever known," he said.

"Yes, Lewis, yes, I know; God bless you! you have always been on Arthur's side."

Lucy stood by with strange currents of thought going through her mind, dimly understanding the man who was not her lover, but whose imagination was pre-occupied past being touched by any one else—yet tempted grievously to misunderstand him,

and wondering with a latent pain just ready to come into being, whether this was one of the common mockeries of fate which made her mother receive him thus almost as a son, at the very time when he had ceased to entertain that sentiment which might have made a true son of him? Strange are the vagaries of young minds at this doubtful period, when everything is undisclosed and uncertain. She had entertained no doubt as to who it was who occupied his imagination when he had said those words. Did she really entertain a doubt now? or was she fostering such a thing into being—trying to make herself believe it? it would be hard to say. She stood by wondering, feeling in herself all the germs of doubt, and that inclination to nurse and develope them, and make herself unhappy which most of us have felt; all this, however, tempered by a curious thrill of pleasure to hear what Lady Curtis said. Lewis! they had called him Lewis Durant among themself for years, as (she felt no doubt) he had called her Lucy; but the name had

never been employed before by anyone but Arthur. This was a leap unspeakable in intimacy. Lady Curtis had adopted him, so to speak, by thus involuntary casting herself upon him, and the sudden use of his name. But what did *he* think? was it Arthur only that was in his mind?

Lucy drew her mother's chair to the fire, and pulled off her own thick outdoor jacket. There was tea on the table ready to be poured out, and the soft lamplight and warm glow of the fire brought out all the prettiness of the room, with its gay tints and gleams of gold. What had trouble to do in that cheerful place, amid those artificial graces which had become natural and kindly by use and wont? The stir of her daughter's movements brought Lady Curtis to herself. They sat down round the fire as if the new comer had been another son, and talked of Arthur. It was almost as endless, almost as engrossing a talk as when the mother and sister sat alone together, and felt as if they could never cease. But by and by Sir John came in for his cup of tea, and

asked how it was the train was so late, and all the particulars of the journey. Sir John himself had delayed half an hour beyond his usual time in coming for his tea. He had felt Durant's arrival too.

CHAPTER X.

THE next day the ordinary guests began to arrive at Oakley. They were not of a very lively character. With an instinctive sense of the difference, which the family were scarcely conscious of, changes had been made in the list of visitors which would have been got together in Arthur's time. Scarcely any young men were of the party. When there is not a young man in the house what use in asking young men? unless it had been in a matrimonial point of view for Lucy's sake, an idea which not only Lucy but her mother regarded (in the latter case injudiciously, it ought to be said) with scorn. Sir John had given up hunting long ago, and if he made a serious shot once or

twice in a season, it was more upon the principle which makes an old king open a ball than any more active personal liking for the sport. The party accordingly consisted in great part of his contemporaries, some in Parliament, some in the law, chiefly belonging to the learned professions. There was a judge, and there was the head of a college, and for a few days there was a bishop; but as this latter functionary was the most sportive member of the party, he could not be counted as adding to its solemnity; and these magnates of course did not stay long. And then there was the Master of the Hounds who was more solemn; and there were the wives of these gentlemen, and in some cases their daughters, and a stray man or two of the order of those who know everybody and have been everywhere, and have done a little of everything, without getting more than a general reputation for themselves, and without giving any very clear indications to the world where they sprang from or to whom they belonged. There were also a few ladies of the same species,

but whose families and antecedents were unimpeachable. It was Lady Curtis who abhored dullness, who had added these. Sir John liked the dullness, and did not object to having a lady next to him who dined well and said little. In spite of Lady Curtis's efforts, however, the party was dull. It was perhaps too elderly and too serious. Well conducted married people are dull in society. They are not sufficiently interested in each other to exert themselves for each other's amusement, and there can be little doubt that as a source of diversion and interest to their fellow creatures, a couple of naughty persons bent on flirtation and ill-behaviour make a better recompense to their entertainers. This element was sadly wanting at Oakley; there was no little drama to watch, legitimate genteel comedy ripening towards marriage and all the domestic joys, or more reprehensible episode tending the other way, such as often proves more exciting still to the jaded appetite of society. And it can scarcely be wondered at, if in the absence of other fun this res-

pectable assembly threw itself on the affairs of the family. There was a great deal of conversation in corners about Arthur's marriage. The Bates family were too low down in the world to have even reached the level of gossip, and except that he had made a very foolish marriage, a *mésalliance* in every sense of the word, no one knew anything further, except one lady was acquainted with Mrs. Anthony Curtis, and had received from her a vague account of her meeting with Nancy. This lady had formed an idea, quite erroneous as it happened, yet an idea, of Arthur's wife, which was a point not attained to by anybody else in the house. She thought (as seemed so natural) that Nancy must have been an actress in a minor theatre, a nameless *figurante*, one of the class who are supposed to enthral well-born young men, and who, wonder of wonders, do so, to the everlasting astonishment of the world, notwithstanding all its theories on the subject. But it did not enter into anybody's mind to suppose that the girl whom Arthur had

married had not the advantage of being wicked and shameless. The lady who knew the story whispered it to others when none of the family were present. "Turned her out of her rooms, I assure you, my dear," she said; "they were in the best rooms of a most expensive hotel, I need not say. Such people never spare any expense."

"A girl from a theatre!—but what theatre? There are such differences; that means anything, from a lady to a dressing-girl."

"She was not a lady, at least; that is the only one thing that is certain. She was a—" Here the teller of the tale stopped abruptly, adding in a louder tone, "I know only one lady on the stage, but she is enough to justify any amount of raving. Mrs. Kenworthy—don't you know—you must have seen her."

It need not be added that it was one of Lady Curtis's friends, a middle-aged person who knew everybody, who spoke, and that the sudden break was owing to the entrance of Lucy, who came in unsuspi-

cious, and caught them in the middle of their talk.

"Oh, yes, I have seen her," said another, faltering, while the other members of the party broke up suspiciously, and began to talk to each other with great earnestness. Lucy had thought no evil when she came in, to see all the heads together, but this breaking up and evident desire to conceal the subject of discussion roused her. These were the sort of conversations that went on through the hospitable house. When Sir John was alone for a few minutes with the Judge, who had been the friend of his youth, that learned functionary took him by the button-hole, and said, "What's this, what's this, Curtis, I hear about your son?" They talked of it under Lady Curtis's eye in the drawing-room as they sipped their tea. Poor Arthur had been cast off by his family, they said; he must have been living a bad life before, or he could never have been thrown in the way of such a person, and never could have married her. Had he married her? that was the next

question. Or was it not altogether disreputable, the connection itself and everything about it? So they talked; and Lucy for once got to feel it in the air, and to lose her temper sometimes at the sense of this strange mass of secret criticism of which her family was the object. She made an assault upon her cousin, the Rector, in the midst of it with nervous vehemence. He had been talking to Miss Wilton, the lady who had rushed into a description of Mrs. Kenworthy, when Lucy came into the room that morning and interrupted more important talk. Lucy, watching, had perceived that Bertie had held back while the other had been pressing questions upon him, and that after the interview Miss Wilton had hurried to a pair of expecting friends, and communicated to them the information which she had acquired. Miss Curtis called her cousin to her with a somewhat imperious gesture, a gesture, however, which he was very willing to obey.

Hubert Curtis had not found himself, so far, any the better for the misfortune which

had happened to Arthur. He was not taken more into favour at the Hall, nor did Lucy incline more to his society than when her brother was at Oakley. He had not gained any ground. However likely it might be that she would have a larger portion of the family goods, Bertie saw no probability that the advantage would in any way come to himself; he had almost, he thought, lost instead of gaining by Arthur's absence. When Arthur was at home, he, as the nearest neighbour, the only man of anything near his own age close at hand, had a natural place at Oakley besides that derived from his relationship. But now what had he to do at the Hall? Lucy did not encourage him, certainly, in any devotion to her. Lady Curtis had an instinctive, half-jealous dislike to him, as she would have had probably to any young man whose sensible and correct behaviour was a standing reproach to Arthur. And Sir John could not be troubled by Bertie's peace-making and desire to persuade him that all would eventually be well. Therefore he had suffered with Arthur, which was a

thing he did not calculate upon; and it would be impossible to deny that his mother's story about Arthur's wife had given him a kind of grim satisfaction. If he were not bettered, at least others were the worse; he said, "poor Arthur!" with contemptuous content. If a man chose to make a fool of himself like that, it was only right that he should pay the penalty, and he had been unable to refrain from repeating his mother's story to Mrs. Rolt, who was shocked and grieved, as Bertie, too, assumed to be. But he had not been guilty of the treachery of discussing it at the Hall. When Miss Wilton spoke to him, he had no desire to give her any further information, but answered as sparingly as possible. Of course it was now, when he really had been exercising a certain amount of virtue, that his punishment came.

"Bertie," said Lucy, as he came up to her, "I want to know why my aunt goes on spreading that story, and why you talk it over with everybody except mamma and me?"

"What story?" But he did not attempt to deceive her further by pretending that he did not know.

"We were the most interested," said Lucy. "If you had told us it would have been natural, and perhaps kind; but why do you tell it to other people? What good could that do?"

"What other people have I told it to?" he said. "I was questioned over there, but I made no reply, or at least as little as I could. I told Mrs. Rolt, and I beg your pardon for that. She was so anxious to know something, and I knew she was to be trusted. Don't blame me, Lucy; I have not intended to be hard upon Arthur."

"Hard upon Arthur! I did not suppose so; he can fight his own battles," said Lucy, raising her head with a look which was almost haughty. "But you are unkind to us. You are my cousin, our nearest relation, Bertie. You should not go about telling disagreeable stories. And then you are a—"

"Go on," he said; "recall me to my duties. I am a clergyman—was not that

what you were about to say? and I ought not to be a gossip, going from house to house. I will not attempt to defend myself, Lucy. If that is my character, it is better I should say nothing; and certainly, if you think so, I cannot undertake to undeceive you. It is you who are unkind to me."

"I don't think so. I did not mean to say so much as that," said Lucy, abashed. "But oh, Bertie, why should you treat *us* so? Are not we, is not Arthur, your own flesh and blood."

"I am but too ready to acknowledge it, too glad to think of it," he said with a sudden smile.

And as Lucy had no difficulty in looking at him, no shyness about meeting his eyes, she could not help seeing the eagerness in them, and softening of unmistakeable sentiment. Altogether, apart from the fact that she would be very well off and an excellent match, he liked her as sincerely as was in him. Love, perhaps, is too strong a word; but he liked her, well enough to have wanted to marry her if she

had only possessed a competence and nothing more, if she had not been in any exceptional position as the only obedient and dutiful child of the house. Whether his sentiment was of a robust enough kind to have made him seek Lucy had she been poor, is a different question; but it might even have been strong enough for this, perhaps, for all anyone could say.

She was softened too. Lucy was not one of those *farouche* young women who resent being loved. She was sorry that any such mistaken feeling should be in his mind, if it was in his mind; but all the same she was rather softened than hardened by the look of eager conciliatoriness and desire to please her, which was in his face.

"Aunt Anthony might have told us herself. She need not have let other people know," she said, shifting her ground, and in a gentler tone.

But here he had a very good answer provided.

"My mother is not here," he said, quite gently, without a tinge of reproach. "She cannot either explain or defend herself."

What could Lucy say? She blushed crimson, deeply moved by the sting of this retort courteous.

"I wished her to be here," she said.

"You always wish what is kind. I did not think it was you; but, Lucy, don't you see—"

At this moment Sir John came up, placing himself so that the conversation was interrupted. As the mantel-piece was not near enough to be leant upon, he leaned upon one of the marble consoles behind which a big glass rose to the ceiling, reflecting his figure and the faces of the two in front of him.

"I have often noticed," he said, "that when we have a mild rainy November, the cold is bitter in spring. Have you remarked that, Bertie? But, to be sure, you are not a country bird, you don't know much about the weather; but you will learn, you will learn before you are my age."

"It seems a simple enough conclusion, and I don't mind accepting it as part of my creed," said the Rector with a laugh, in which, however, there was some surprise

mixed, for he did not understand what motive his uncle could have in placing himself there to make this very unimportant remark.

"They tell me the meet is to be here to-morrow," said Sir John; "and some of the ladies are going to ride. I am very glad Lucy doesn't hunt. You had better come up and make yourself useful, Bertie, now that there's nobody in the house. I suppose you don't ride now to speak of? Of course, there's Durant; I don't know what his fancy is. I never was a cross-country man myself. I was always fond of more serious pursuits. Your father now, my brother Tony, he was always fond of it—a sort of practical fellow. As for me, I always took a pleasure in more serious things."

"You were born for Parliament, Sir," said the Rector, half with veiled satire, half with a disposition to please his uncle, who had been kind enough, and from whom more kindness yet might come.

"Well, yes, perhaps you are right," said Sir John; "that was more in my way; I always took an interest in public busi-

ness. When I was a boy at Eton I used to read the debates as regularly as I do now —and I have never changed my principles or turned my coat, Bertie. That is something to say after thirty years of public life. I have never seen reason to modify my opinions as so many people do. One set of principles has been enough to guide me through life, and I cannot believe that any man wants more."

"It is a very happy state of mind, Sir," said the Rector, wondering more and more why his uncle had elected him to hear the characteristics of his wisdom. Lucy had cleverly stolen away to do her duty by the other guests, and only Lady Curtis was aware of her husband's real meaning. She smiled within herself at his simple device to separate Lucy from a a man who might put in the pretensions of a lover. But when Lucy, after stealing away from her cousin's side, was to be seen a little while after at Durant's, then it was Lady Curtis's turn to look serious, and she herself moved from her own chair when she saw them talking,

with a lively sense of the same need for interference which had moved her husband. When Lady Curtis joined them their conversation was simple enough, nothing to alarm any parent; but yet she remained there talking with something of her old brightness, until Lucy had left that end of the room, too, in turn, and had gone to carry consolation to old Mrs. Nuttenden in the corner, who was slightly deaf, and not amusing—with her efforts to amuse whom, nobody interfered.

Durant did not notice the gentle interference in the Rector's case, but he felt it very distinctly in his own, and with a little pang said to himself, that he would give no occasion for this watchfulness, but would shorten his proposed stay as he had already intended to do. This was not because there was any failure of the kindness, even the affection with which he had been first received. Lady Curtis talked to him as she did to nobody else but Lucy, confided in him—called him Lewis, as she had done when he arrived, and dis-

cussed her son with him, with family freedom and trust, in a manner indeed which would have filled many young men with fond imaginations and made them feel themselves almost wooed. And Sir John was quite kind, though in a different way. He had always been slightly suspicious of Durant as one of those clever men who are never quite safe, and of whom you cannot be too sure what levelling and atheistical sentiments may accompany their intellectual gifts. One of my Lady's sort of people, Sir John had always considered him, not a retainer of his own, but on the other side; yet because he was so associated with Arthur, Sir John's heart had melted to him also. So that it was no failure of the most cordial welcome which made Durant feel it better to hasten away. He went to his room that night quite decided by the manner of the woman who called him by his Christian name, and looked at him with such motherly affection in her eyes. Was it Lady Curtis's fault? He did not blame her. He said to himself, that had Lucy

been his own sister, he would not have given her to a poor barrister without family, without connections, with burdens of his own upon his shoulders, and no honours to bestow. Why should he linger there? Now that Arthur was so far off from Oakley—now, above all, that Arthur was *married*, the most complete of severing influences, it was inevitable (he said) that his connection with Oakley must gradually drop off. They would not mean it—they would not wish it—yet it would come to pass; and why should he seek to prevent it? Was there not between them a great gulf fixed—that gulf which wealth might fill up, perhaps, which his old grandfather's money might have thrown a golden bridge across, had it still existed; but which now gaped like the bottomless pit, and could never be crossed by any skill or effort of his. Should he stay only to impress this more and more upon himself? He made up his mind that very night.

But that did not hinder him on the next day after these events, which was Sunday,

from finding himself by Lucy's side in one of the quiet moments of that quiet day. He was going off the next morning, and it chanced to him, unawares, to come into the Louis Quinze room in the interval between church and luncheon, which is a moment of general dispersion in which no one knows where any one is. Lucy was in the morning-room writing a letter, when Durant came in. He was very self-denying, yet when she stopped and laid down her pen, and said, "Come in, don't go away!" he could not resist the invitation. He came in and stood near her, leaning upon the corner of the mantel-shelf close to one of those big rococo Cupids between whom Sir John was so fond of placing himself. And Lucy was a little eager, almost agitated, more resolute to talk to him than he was to talk to her. She said without any preface, "Are you really going away to-morrow? I was surprised—and I don't seem to have seen you at all, or to have said half I had to say."

"I must go," he said with a sigh, "for many reasons; and chiefly because—"

"Because what? You do not think there is any change, Mr. Durant? You must not think there is any change: there is no one mamma trusts in so entirely as in you."

"I am very glad to think so," he said, "and to believe that she would trust me if any thing occurred—if I was wanted." Here he made a pause, and added in a low tone, "and you too?"

"And I too! can you doubt it? I know," said Lucy faltering, "that Arthur has no such true friend."

He made a little unconscious gesture with his hand. She knew exactly what it meant. It meant Arthur, always Arthur! never anything on his own account; always for the use that might be made of him. But this would have been very unreasonable had he put it into words, for it was precisely on this reason that he had claimed to be trusted, "if anything occurred—if he was wanted." Very unreasonable and inconsistent; but then men are so.

And what could she say? She could

not take the initiative, and tell him that her interest in him, at least, was not all on account of Arthur. She made a tremulous pause, and then said, "Everything is so different this year. We have done nothing but talk to you of Arthur. The time seems gone in which we used to talk so freely—of, us all."

"Yes," he said, "it is kind, very kind of you to use such words. What talks we have had here of—us all! before we had began to feel the differences between us."

"What differences?" she said eagerly. "Mr. Durant, I hope you are too generous to think that any outside differences—" Poor Lucy coloured and grew so eager, that her earnestness defeated its object, and she could not get the words out.

"Not that," he said, "not the loss of our money. I know no one here would think the less of me for that—perhaps the better," he added with a smile, "as being just a poor man now, without any pretence of equality on account of wealth.

I did not mean that; but rather the enlightenment that comes with years, and that shows to me how little I, being what I am, ever could be on the same footing with you."

"Mr. Durant, you are unkind—you *are* ungenerous!"

"Not so—not so; but I am older and a little wiser. And according to the custom of mortal things, this enlightenment comes just when it is most painful to me—most bitter to realise."

"I cannot hear you say so," Lucy said, getting up trembling from her chair. "Difference—what difference? I know none. I never have been told of any."

And he looked at her all quivering with the desire to say more—to set open the doors of his heart, and show her herself in it, and all that was there. He looked at her, and shook his head sadly.

"I have no right to say any more. I would be a poor creature if I said any more; but still it is so—and it is better for me to go away. You will not misunderstand me? That would be the cruellest of all."

"I think there is one thing more cruel," said Lucy with an impulse which carried her away, and for which she could not forgive herself afterwards, "and that is to speak mysteries to your friends, and expect them to understand you, yet never tell them what you mean—that is the thing that is most cruel."

"Should I speak then, though it is hopeless—though it is almost dishonourable?" he cried excited and breathless. Lucy trembling, turned half, yet but half away.

"Ah! you are here then! I have been looking for you," said the voice of Lady Curtis at the door. "You are talking to Lucy who has a letter to write, and I have something to say to you, Lewis—come to me here."

Lucy had gone back to her writing before her mother stopped speaking; she did not even look at him again; but she said very low, "I think I understand," as he passed her slowly to obey that call.

And next morning he went away.

CHAPTER XI.

AFTER the crisis of that conversation with Mrs. Curtis, which was at the bottom of so much harm and mischief, Arthur and Nancy stopped quarrelling with each other. They had each done and said things which they were disposed to repent of—and felt the existence generally of a state of things which was alarming, which at their worst they could not see without feeling that it might be possible to go too far. The fact that Arthur had gone away without seeing her after her rudeness to his aunt, his absence for hours, his absolute silence on the subject when they met at dinner had produced a great effect upon Nancy. It had been on her lips all the evening through to intro-

duce the subject, to excuse herself or defend herself according as might be most suitable at the moment. But Arthur gave her no occasion. He had the advantage of education over her, the habit of self-restraint, at least the sense that it was necessary on occasion to restrain himself, an elementary lesson which Nancy had not as yet arrived at. And the effect upon her was great. She, too, kept silent, though against her will. She shut up in her breast this subject which, if she had talked about it, would, no doubt, have inflamed her to double wrath. And she grew a little frightened of the husband whom hitherto she had played with as she would, but who now in his newborn reserve and stillness was more than she could manage. She was afraid of him for the moment. He was no longer in her power. A tremendous menace seemed to lurk in his silence; and the consequence was that they lived in much greater harmony for the next week, both a little alarmed and penitent, and afraid of taking another step in the wrong direction. At

the end of that time Arthur made the discovery which Nancy had already suggested to him, that howsoever great might be his desire to go to Italy, his means would not permit it. They had been living in their charming little apartment for three weeks, they had used a carriage constantly, and all that a Paris hotel can furnish that was most agreeable to eye and palate, and there was nothing, or next to nothing left. Arthur had not realised this fact when he had written his letter to his father. He had written indeed more out of the painful determination within him to uphold his wife, even in the face of what she had done to his relatives, by yielding to her will about their future, than from any more reasonable motive. He knew very well how that story would fly, how it would get to the ears of his mother and Lucy, and how everybody who knew him would pity poor Arthur. This it was which made him suddenly abandon his opposition, and determine to do as she wished. At all hazards he would maintain her credit, whatever might be her

treatment of him. They might make her out to be what they pleased, they might tell what stories they would—he could not he knew contest them, but at all events everybody should see that he at least upheld her in her way of acting, gave her his support through all. This generous, if perhaps foolish, resolution, which was full of that grieved and suffering love which can no longer deny the justice of the accusations against its beloved, had been come to before he knew the necessity of returning home; but that necessity made it less forced and unnatural. For the last week of their stay there was little attempt at amusement. Denham, who had found great satisfaction in watching the proceedings of the bride, and who had already made many circles merry by his descriptions of her husband's anxious endeavours to interest her in what she saw and heard, and her own absolute ignorance and unconcealed *ennui*, was ever at hand to suggest something, and had indeed two or three plans of his own for sharing this charming spectacle with some of his friends, with a trust in Arthur's sim-

plicity, which might not have been justified by the event. There were two in particular to whom he had promised an introduction to his "delicious Englishwoman," had the young pair accepted the box at the Odéon which he had offered them, and the mischievous attaché was much disappointed by the failure of his plans. They declined it, however, with one accord. Nancy had quite convinced herself that it was "no fun" going to plays when you did not understand a word, and Arthur, on his side, had become disgusted with everything public. How did he know that they might not meet some one else whom he should be obliged to introduce to his wife, and whom his wife would receive with the same amiability which she had shown to Mrs. Curtis? The Curtises were still in Paris, and he had himself held an agitating conference with his aunt and Mary; but they came no more to the Rue Rivoli. This opportunity of making friends had been turned into the easiest way of making enemies. He would make no more such essays. Ac-

cordingly they sat "at home," in the pretty little room with the white walls and white curtains. Arthur could always write his letters—it was not many he had to write now, as his family correspondence was cut off, and he had dropped most of his friends, but still he kept up the phrase; he wrote his letters, while she sat by the fire, sometimes taking out and putting in frills or trimmings to her dresses, sometimes yawning over a newspaper; they talked to each other a little now and then, and yawned in the intervals; they had no books except a few Tauchnitz volumes, which saved them from a complete breakdown, and they went early to bed which seemed always a virtuous thing to do. Thus the days went by. They did not talk any longer about going "home," but it was tacitly understood between them that they were going *back*. This was what they had got to call it. And the day was fixed, and the boxes packed, and all settled, with scarcely any further consultation. Life, however, had become very sober prose after the triumphant exultation

of the beginning, when three weeks after their marriage they crossed the Channel again on an early morning, Nancy very ill, and Arthur dignified but pale, and arrived at London on a rainy December night, wet and miserable as anything could well be.

Next day they went *back*. Arthur had taken rooms at the little inn which stood opposite Mr. Eagles' house, looking on the green, where Durant had been lodged. But before they reached that place there was a greeting to be got through at the station, the whole Bates family, no less, having assembled to welcome their daughter. Nancy's spirits had risen from the moment she had touched English soil. She had talked to everybody, guards, porters, the servants at the hotel, with exuberant satisfaction, notwithstanding the bad passage and its natural consequences.

"Oh, what a blessing to be at home!" she said. "Oh, Arthur, isn't it nice to be back? I feel as if I should like to hug everybody. How much nicer everything looks in England! One can have some tea or some beer, instead of always that

sour wine; and sausage-rolls and Bath buns!" cried Nancy, looking at these appalling luxuries in the Dover refreshment-room with unfeigned delight. It had been on Arthur's lips to cry out, "For heaven's sake speak a little lower!" but he said to himself, what was the use? One or two people turned round and smiled. And she bought a Bath-bun notwithstanding her recent sufferings. It seemed to Nancy better than all the delicate *plats* in the world. It was English, it was adapted to her native tastes and her usually fine digestion. Arthur hurried her away with the objectionable dainty in a little paper-bag in her hand.

"We must give in to prejudices a little," he said. "You know most people think there is nothing like French cookery."

"I would not give a nice plain English dinner—mother will have one for us to-morrow, I know—for all the little oddments they have in France," said Nancy.

When she was Nancy Bates she did not talk like this, nor eat Bath-buns out of paper bags. The fact of being Mrs. Arthur

Curtis, with a fine gentleman, an unmistakeable "swell" for a husband, became again an exhilarating consciousness, and turned Nancy's head a little as soon as she had got to England again; and how could she show her satisfaction so well as by that demonstrative indulgence of personal tastes, and ostentation of personal satisfaction which is the essence of vulgarity, yet may be the mere froth of ignorance and light-hearted confidence? All this was sufficiently trying to Arthur, especially when strangers heard these patriotic outbursts, and showed by their smiles, as they passed, their appreciation of her simplicity. But when they got to Underhayes station, where Mrs. Bates, Matilda, and Sarah Jane stood on the platform waiting, Arthur's heart sank in his bosom. Why? If Nancy's mother had been a duchess, she could not have done anything different. But Mrs. Bates, with her brown front, and the flowers in her bonnet, and Sarah Jane in the latest fashion, were too much for poor Arthur. He busied himself about the luggage, and wondered how it was, for all

so many times as he had seen them before, that he had never seen them until now? And this was how he was to be surrounded for the rest of his life! Visions of his mother and Lucy came gliding before him as he saw Nancy's boxes, so much larger and heavier now than when they went away, lifted out—his own people! with their light steps, their soft voices, the tender delight in their eyes. Mrs. Bates was probably as fond of her child as Lady Curtis was of Arthur; that she should show that fondness so differently was not her fault, but that of Providence which had settled her lot in life. He tried to say to himself that this was so, but it was hard. On the whole, the best thing was to look after the boxes until those welcomes and embraces were over, which all the town seemed to have come out to see. Some of Mr. Eagles' "men" were among the passengers by the train. Arthur shrank among the luggage altogether to escape from their eyes.

"Where is Arthur?" said Mrs. Bates. "I hope Arthur knows that you're not going to be allowed to go off to an inn the

first day you come back. To be sure, it's tea, not dinner, as I suppose you've been accustomed to; but tea, with a nice roast chicken and sausages, which is as good as a dinner every day; and it's all ready and waiting. Arthur! How long he is about the boxes to be sure. Shall we leave him to send them down to the 'Dragon,' and you come along, my Nancy, with me?"

"Arthur! Arthur!" cried Sarah Jane at the top of her voice, rushing towards him, "mother's gone on with Nancy, and I'm to wait for you. You needn't be so particular about the boxes, the porter will take them safe enough. And come along, do come along! Nancy's gone on before with mother, and I'm quite hungry for my tea."

One of the "men" at Mr. Eagles' turned round, hearing every word of this speech, and grinned, Arthur thought, in derision.

"Don't wait for me," he said, faintly. "Go on, please, and I will follow. There are a great many things to be looked after, and I must see what sort of rooms they have given us. Go on, and never mind me."

"Oh, if you're too fine to walk down

Underhayes with your own sister-in-law!" cried Sarah Jane; and to Arthur's great relief she took offence, and rushed after her mother and sisters, calling this time, "Nancy! Nancy! stop a bit, I'm coming."

The "man" lingered till she was gone, perhaps with a little pity for the bride-groom. He was a happy boy of twenty, working his eyes out for the Indian Civil examination, who had always been accustomed to think that his was rather a hard case, and that Curtis was a great "swell."

"How d'ye do, Curtis? Can I look after these things for you?" he said, coming up shyly. Arthur made haste to clear every sign of cloudy weather from his downcast face.

"It *is* a bother looking after them," he said; "my first try, you know—and one loses one's temper. Still grinding hard, I suppose?"

"Harder and harder! Eagles gets more mad every day. What lucky fellows some people are!" said the young man with a little sigh, as he nodded and turned away.

Arthur felt himself echo the sigh. Was

it he that was the lucky fellow? He had thought so too when he left Underhayes, carrying with him the bride for whom he had felt willing to relinquish all the world. This is an easy thing enough to say. To relinquish all the world, and carry one's Nancy off into some flowery Eden where nobody could intermeddle with one's bliss —ah, yes; but the Bates family! They, it was evident would not permit themselves to be relinquished like all the world. Arthur walked at his leisure, glad to defer the moment of reunion, down to the inn, and saw his rooms and deposited his luggage. Perhaps Nancy had a right to be angry when at last he followed her. They had waited till the chicken and sausages were nearly cold; but by this time they were in the middle of their meal, Mr. Bates already in his slippers at the foot of the table when Arthur arrived. The little parlour was hot and close, full of mingled odours; they were all a little flushed, what with the unusual warmth, what with the meal. Nancy herself had been placed next to the fire, as the tra-

veller to whom the best place was necessarily given, and she was crimson with excitement, pleasure, anger, and the stifling atmosphere all combined. The voices all ceased when Arthur came in.

"I think you might have paid my mother the respect of coming directly," said Nancy in high tones.

"Oh, hush, dear, hush! I am sure Arthur didn't mean any rudeness," said Mrs. Bates.

But there was an interval of silence, marking general disapproval, and they all turned to look at him as at a culprit. He sat down in the vacant place much against his will, amid unfriendly or indignant looks. Even to the Bates' family he was no longer welcome as an angel from Heaven.

"I am sorry everything is cold," said Mrs. Bates; "we waited as long as we could. But Nancy wanted her tea very badly after her journey. Here is a leg of chicken I saved for you."

"I am not hungry," said Arthur, feeling his new alienation and separation amid all the silent party. "I will take a cup of

tea, please. I had the boxes to look after."

"You might have left the boxes to take care of themselves," said his wife; "you are not always so careful. You might have come with me when I first came home after being married. And all the people about staring; but you don't mind. It used to be different when we were here before; but I ain't of so much consequence now," cried Nancy. "Wives are different from sweethearts; I see that all now."

Arthur felt a sensation of chill despair come over him in the midst of this domestic heat. He restrained himself by a strange effort and would say nothing; and, indeed, he did not feel the impulse of passion to speak. A dreary despondency took possession of him. How often he had sat there on the sofa in the corner, and felt himself happy! What was it that made the change? for Nancy had shown "tempers," fits of caprice, uncertainty of mood before their marriage. But it had not affected him as it did now. Succour came to him, however, in an unexpected way.

"I don't approve of nagging at a man, whatever he's done," said Mr. Bates. "If you've had any tiffs honeymooning, you should have the sense to stop 'em now. If you like to quarrel in your own place, I'll not interfere, I haven't got the right; but don't do it here. Your father's house is no more than a friend's house so far as that goes. It ain't your place, Nancy, to expose your husband here."

"I hope I know what's my place, as well as you or anyone," said Nancy, growing red, and accepting the challenge. She had never been fond of restraint, and she liked it now less than ever. She gave her head a toss of defiance, entrenched as she was behind the walls of support and shelter which her mother and sisters gave, who unconditionally took her side. She flashed defiance at the other end of the table, where Arthur sat with a flush of shame on his face, and poor Mr. Bates in his crumpled white tie for his sole partisan.

"I think Mr. Bates is right," said Arthur, "and that it would be better to postpone this question till we are alone."

"And I hope you found Paris pleasant, Sir," said the well-intentioned father. "I have often heard that it was a very fine city. It must have been a great advantage for Nancy, seeing it with one that knew it well. In my young days going to France was more of a business than going to America is now. Me and Mrs. Bates never had the benefit of foreign travel; but there are a many things you young people enjoy now that your fathers and your mothers didn't have."

"You may speak for yourself, Mr. Bates," said his wife. "I cannot say that I ever had any desire to go to foreign parts. There is plenty to learn in England if one would make a good use of what one knows; and Nancy, poor child, don't seem to have enjoyed it. Look how thin she is, and so pale. She quite frightened me when I saw her first. 'Is that my blooming Nancy?' I said to myself—not meaning to throw any reflection upon Arthur. What does man know of such things? She's been doing too much. I feel sure that's what it is, rattling about

here and there and everywhere, and engagements in the evening—"

"We didn't have many engagements in the evening," said Nancy. "We used to go to the theatres at first; but we soon got tired. The acting was so bad, not like English acting; and such queer French, not a bit like anything I ever learnt. For one thing, they talk so fast. But I could not understand a bit, and what was the good of going to a play and not understanding a word? And we never saw anybody, except an aunt of Arthur's, a person—but I won't speak of her, for she was rude to me—and Sir John Denham, who used to come and sit of an evening, and who brought us tickets for places. It was very kind of him; and there was a lot of places to see, and a whole lot of old pictures and things that Arthur thought I was to go crazy over; but I never did. One place was where some prison was knocked down (I never remembered the names) and, another was where the Queen had her head cut off."

"Oh, la!" cried Sarah Jane.

"Yes, that was a pleasant thing to be interested in, wasn't it? Oh, the lots and lots of people that had their heads cut off, if you could put any faith in it! As if that was what one wanted to see! I never believed one quarter of what they said."

"And quite right," said her mother; "they do make up stories; but didn't you go to see something a little livelier, Nancy? I thought there was everything that was gay in Paris. But if that was all, my poor child, I don't wonder if you felt low, away from everybody you knew. But things will be quite different now," she said, encouragingly. "You will settle down, you and Arthur, in a nice snug little English 'ome. There is no place like 'ome, as the song says. And you'll fall into each other's ways; and you'll have us close at hand if anything's wrong. Oh, you'll see everything will go as smooth as velvet! and me, or Sarah Jane, or Matty always to help you to put things straight."

At this prospect Nancy brightened up, and the conversation went on in a livelier

strain. But Nancy's brows lowered when Arthur, feeling it all grow more and more intolerable, got up just before the rum-and-water stage, under pretence of business.

"I have some letters which I must write," he said. Nancy's countenance grew dark again, and Mr. Bates lamented audibly.

"I thought you'd have joined me and been comfortable, now you're a married man and got your courting over," said the tax-collector. Poor Arthur! was this expected of him, that he should share the rum-and-water too? He scarcely knew how he managed to get away at last, promising to return for his wife when his letters were written. But he had in reality no letters to write. He walked about through the darkness very sadly, wondering what he was to do. It was weak perhaps to have yielded to her, to have suffered her to lead him back here; it was all intolerable, the house, the family, the talk. They had been well enough once, how did it happen that they were beyond all patience now?

CHAPTER XVI.

NEXT day, restored to perfect good-humour by the occupation, Nancy went out with her mother to look at some houses which they had already selected for her choice. She came into the little sitting-room, in which Arthur had talked to Durant about his marriage, and where the young pair were established now—glowing and beaming from her early walk, to tell him all about these desirable residences. Rose Villas, Glenfield Road, was the name of the row, in which there were two houses, one empty, and one furnished, to be let.

"You must come with me and see them the moment you have had your lunch—I don't want any lunch," cried Nancy. "I am so delighted! The dearest little houses,

Arthur! just big enough for us, and so bright, with gardens back and front, and everything that heart could desire."

"But we don't want two houses, do we?" he said.

"No, you silly boy; but if we take the one that is furnished, don't you see, for a little while, and the one that is not furnished for a permanency, then we can be comfortable in the one house while we furnish the other; ain't that clever?" said Nancy, laughing. "I can't fancy anything more delightful. Make haste with your luncheon, Arthur. Oh, yes, I will sit down with you, I will take a morsel; but I am in such a hurry. I do hope you will like them as much as I do. It is so nice to think of having a 'ome, as mother says."

Arthur did not make any reply; after so much stormy weather as there had been, it grieved him to destroy all this sunshine by any remonstrances. He was glad to bask in it a little and put off the next difficulty. It was a bright winter afternoon when they sallied forth together,

the red sun descending towards the west, and throwing up all the leafless trees beyond Mr. Eagles' great house as on a crimson background, against which every branch and twig stood out—the Green more brilliantly green than usual from the many rains and from the afternoon redness which enhanced its colour—the red-brick houses all ruddy and warm in the light. Even to Arthur, whose heart was heavy, it was a pleasant walk to Glenfield Road. They were alone, and Nancy was in the gayest humour, full of satisfaction with herself. Though she had lost her confidence in the Paris dresses, which had much disappointed her mother and sisters, and was afraid that her travelling costume looked dreadfully dowdy (which was Sarah Jane's opinion)—yet the sense of being at home, able to dazzle all her old companions with her good fortune, and to feel that her house and husband, and all her possessions, would be admired and to envied by the right people, had calmed all Nancy's susceptibilities and raised her spirits to the highest point. She all but

danced along the street, holding Arthur's arm in a way which may be old-fashioned, but still comes natural to a bride. She was about to have a house of her own, a house fit for a lady, where obsequious tradesmen, once her equals, or better than she, would come for orders. She was about to have servants of her own—not a "girl," as in the Bates' establishment, but a cook and housemaid, as good as the Vicar or any of the fine people on the Green. And all these fine people would call upon her, Nancy thought; who was there among them equal to Mrs. Arthur Curtis, a baronet's daughter-in-law, some time or other to be Lady Curtis—a baronet's wife? —and who could speak familiarly of other baronets, Denham, for instance, as an intimate friend. And then there was Durant.

"Who is Durant," she said, "Arthur? Is he anybody, is his father anybody? I had a long talk with him here once. I was angry—But on the whole I liked Durant."

"He is—my oldest friend; and the man in all the world who knows most about

me," said Arthur, laughing in spite of himself; "but further information would not enlighten you, Nancy—"

"You mean that I don't know your peerages, and that sort of thing," said Nancy, piqued a little.

This time Arthur laughed with good will. "I don't think the peerages would help you much," he said. "Lewis Durant is a clergyman's son, Nancy."

"*Only* a clergyman?" She was disappointed. "But they must have been very rich or something, Arthur, or such proud folks as your people would not have let Durant be so intimate with you."

"My people," said Arthur with some haste, "would not have thought of interfering with my school friends to ask whose sons they were; and Lewis's family *were* rich—but they are not rich now. Call him Lewis, if you please, when you speak of him, Nancy; but don't say Durant. It sounds *fast;* and you never will be fast, I hope."

"Oh, it sounds fast, do you think?" Nancy was mollified. When he had made

the same request before, she had thought it a stigma upon her as not knowing how a lady should talk, but this was a lesser offence. "Well then, Mr. Durant—if I must say Mr. Durant—isn't he rich now?"

"No, not at all rich."

"Oh, then I suppose he has to work for his living like—any common man? I am so glad you are not like that, Arthur. What a difference it must make! To have one's husband away all day at his work—or to have one's husband always at one's side, ready to take a walk, or to answer a question, or anything. I am so glad you are a gentleman, Arthur. I never should have been happy had I married a man in any other rank of life."

"Durant is just as much a gentleman as I am, Nancy."

"What! when he has to work for his living? Oh, yes, I know. Whoever wears good clothes, and knows how to behave himself in society, is called a gentleman for the name of the thing, Arthur. The assistants in Shoolbred's are all gentlemen, of course; but that is not what I mean—

you know what I mean. Now supposing that Durant—I mean Mr. Durant—had known us longer, and got to coming to our house as you did, and Sarah Jane and he had fancied each other, she would not have been nearly so happy as I am."

"Was *that* thought of?" said Arthur, with a smile which did not evidence any real amusement. "I did not know that had been seriously thought of."

"Oh, yes, it was thought of. Why shouldn't it have happened? He was your friend; and they say one wedding brings on another. I don't think Sarah Jane would have minded," said Nancy in perfect good faith. "She would have thrown Raisins over in a moment; and indeed I think she treats Raisins very badly with all her flirtations. I tell her it is he who will throw her over one of these days."

"So Durant might have been preferred to Mr. Raisins," said Arthur. "What a chance for Lewis!"

Nancy did not feel quite comfortable about the meaning of this laugh. Perhaps it was not entirely regret for what Durant

had lost; but as at this moment they came in sight of Rose Villas, her whole attention was drawn to the more exciting subject. "There is the empty one, Arthur," she said, "look, how pretty! But I see the door of No. 6 is open, so let us go there first. There is such a pretty garden behind, and the windows open into it. There is not much in the garden now, but it will be delicious in summer. Oh, yes, here we are; this is Mr. Curtis, Mrs. Smith. We have come again, if you please, to go over the house."

"If you please, ma'am," said the prim little landlady, whose lodgings had not let so well as usual, and who was not unwilling to get rid of her house. Nancy ran through it delighted, taking her husband from one room to another. "This you could have to write your letters in, Arthur, and this would be my drawing-room," cried Nancy, glowing with not unlovely pride; "and look what a dear little Davenport, and an inlaid table, and that funny little three-cornered thing in the corner, and a nice white cloth over the

carpet—so clean-looking—almost like our white carpets in Paris."

Arthur allowed himself to be dragged all over the house. It was like a hundred, nay a million other semi-detached suburban villakins. The little rooms were neat enough, if not beautiful; and Arthur, though he had been brought up in Oakley, amid his mother's favourite splendours, was not sufficiently fastidious to be annoyed by the commonplace surroundings. It was not the want of beauty that moved him; but the sensation of "settling down," which was so delightful to Nancy, affected his imagination like a nightmare. She was so satisfied herself, so anxious to know every particular about the maids whom Mrs. Smith "could recommend," so eager about everything, that his gloomy looks passed without remark. And Arthur did not check her delight until, having settled matters with Mrs. Smith, she insisted upon carrying him next to No. 9, which was to let unfurnished. "This is the most interesting," she said. "Come along, Arthur; for you know this

will be our real 'ome—this we will furnish ourselves;" and she dragged him to the door. Nancy did not usually drop her h's, but she was too familiar with this form of the word to call it anything but 'ome.

Here, however, Arthur had strength of mind to resist. "That is enough for to-day. You must not ask me to do more to-day. After dinner we will talk it all over, all about it, over the fire."

"After dinner?" said Nancy. "Oh! I said we would go and see mother, and tell her what we had settled. Why, what is the matter, Arthur—may not I go and see mother? We have only been one day back, and you begin to make faces already! You cannot say I am bringing my people on *you*."

"I think you might be content with me sometimes," said Arthur, with an attempt at a smile.

"I have been content with you for three weeks," said Nancy. "I have never seen a soul but you. I should think you would like to see another face now and again as well as I do—and my own folks!" Arthur did not say any more. He diverted the

conversation into other channels, and led her back to the subject of the villa, which on the whole was safer ground; and when the evening came and their dinner was over, and Nancy went off with a certain gay temerity, yet not without alarm, to get her wrap, Arthur took his hat to accompany her without saying a word. She was in a state of the greatest exultation, scarcely able to restrain little songs of triumph as they walked along the half-lighted street, and clasping his arm close, with a show of affection which went to Arthur's heart.

"At what time shall I come for you?" he said, as they drew near the door.

"Come for me! are you not coming with me, Arthur?"

"I have not finished my letters," he said; "as *you* say, we have had three weeks of holiday; and then I was out with you all this afternoon. I must finish my letters for the post to-night."

She unclasped her hands from his arm without a word, and went in; and the glimpse Arthur had of the parlour did not tempt him to follow. Young Raisins was

one of the company. He was seated on the sofa where Arthur had been in the habit of sitting, presumably behind backs, and out of the observation of the others, with Nancy. Young Raisins was now the lover on hand, and the sight of him in that place sent the blood to Arthur's head as he walked away. Could it be possible that he himself had been unspeakably happy there a few weeks ago, finding nothing but pleasantness in the four strait walls, and beauty in the family affection that made all these people hang so closely together. Raisins now occupied the foreground of the picture as he had done before, with infinitely greater suitability. And this was the home which his wife loved. There was the sting of it! had she been indifferent, undutiful—even careless, as he thought he remembered that she once was; but Nancy's matrimonial experience, which was not entirely successful, perhaps, had thrown her back upon her earlier affections in a way which is not unusual, though Arthur was not aware of that. Her husband and she

had only their love to hold them together; their habits were not like, their manner of thought was different. Even when she was at her boldest and most confident point, Nancy was never quite at home with the "gentleman" she had married; but with her own people, she was entirely at her ease. Arthur did not take this into consideration; but he was candid enough to feel a compunction as he walked away, and to acknowledge that from Nancy's point of view, it might seem hard that he could not spend an hour or two without complaining in the society of the family who had been everything to her all her life. It was hard, that so soon, before a month of her married life was over, she should have to choose between the old home and the new, between her parents and her husband. Arthur had a generous mind, and this perception kept him from feeling himself the aggrieved person, as he had been half disposed to do. It forced him, also, instead of wandering about as he had done on the previous night, and brooding over the difficulties of his new

position, to go back to his hotel and really write the half imaginary letters which were his only business, and the reason which he had again given for his abandonment of that family circle. His letters were not all imaginary: there was one from Mr. Rolt, the agent, in answer to Arthur's letter to his father. Sir John had been too indignant, as well as perhaps (but this he was not conscious of) too little disposed for exertion to answer it himself. He had handed over the note, not to the lawyer brother, against whom Arthur had vowed vengeance, but to the agent, who had always been a favourite, the friend of their youth, with the young Curtises, both boy and girl. Mr. Rolt's letter was very kind and reasonable, and to answer it without proving himself to be in the wrong was difficult. Sir John did not object to raising his allowance—he did not refuse anything Arthur asked him. There was nothing hard in the stipulations, nothing forbidding in what his father's deputy wrote.

"Your family do not wish you to suffer,

how could you think it?—they do not wish to reduce you from your natural position. Had you treated them as they might have expected to be treated, my dear Arthur," wrote the good man who had known him all his life, "you might, I think, have reckoned on Sir John's indulgence to any extent; but you have not put that trust in your father and mother, though they certainly deserved it at your hands; and can you wonder if Sir John is angry? He will not write to you himself, feeling that your letter is not the kind of letter he ought to have had from you in the circumstances; but he has instructed me to tell you that your wishes shall be complied with to any reasonable amount. He does not wish you to suffer in personal comfort in consequence of the step you have taken."

This was the letter which Arthur had to answer. He paused, reflecting on it, repeating to himself, "does not wish you to suffer in personal comfort." Were there other ways which they suspected and calculated upon in which he might

suffer for his disobedience? He paused to go over all that had happened within the last three months. Could he have acted otherwise than he had done? If he had given his confidence to his parents from the beginning, as they reproached him for not doing, what would have been the issue? With what eyes would Lady Curtis and Lucy have looked upon his Nancy, who, for her part, would have defied them? He shook his head as he sat pondering over the sheet of paper before him. No! no! had he confided in them things would have been worse, not better —for anyhow he would have married Nancy, if without their consent, if against their deliberate judgment, what did it matter? except that the last would have been the worst. He could fancy how she would have met their inspection—how she would have repulsed and scorned them. No—no, he repeated to himself. Better to leave them in ignorance than to hazard the open quarrels, the inevitable rending asunder that must have followed. They could not have withdrawn his heart from

Nancy. No, again no! And the breach would have been more bitter, not less. With a sigh he decided that, on the whole, he had not chosen the worst way. He did not say to himself that both were bad enough, but he sighed. Nancy had left him to go to her family, to be happy in the stuffy little parlour, where her father drank his rum and water; and he—he sighed, going no further—for *his* belongings, for his home, for the natural occupations of his life. They did not regret their choice either of them; but yet within the first month of their marriage, this curious return upon themselves had happened to both. Perhaps this is not so wonderful even among the happiest as we pretend; for is not the beginning the hardest, in marriage as in so many other things? Arthur wrote and posted his letter, feeling himself bound to do so after what he had said; then went on to fetch his wife from her father's house. They were very merry there, he could hear as he passed the lighted window; and it was more and more curious to him when he

went in to find young Raisins the master of the situation, amusing them all with his jokes. Arthur, in his time, had never had so much *succès*. He was rather glad to see that Nancy was not enjoying the fun like the rest, but sat a little apart and with a somewhat moody countenance until he entered, when she flung off her gravity, plunged into the riot that was going on round the table, where Mr. Raisins was doing tricks with cards, and laughed and talked with the best. Arthur could not make out whether this was to show him her superior gaiety and light-heartedness at home, or whether it was his own presence which brought back her light-heartedness. And he himself, touched by compunction, did his best to make himself agreeable, to show that he wished for a good intelligence between them. He was more successful in this than he had hoped. Young Raisins' fine qualities had so charmed and delighted the house that Arthur too shared the good feeling he had called forth. Mrs. Bates melted altogether, and spreading out her hands de-

clared that "this *was* a happy meeting," and that "parents" had reason to be satisfied, indeed, when their girls were thus happily settled. "When you all rally round the 'old house,'" were the words the gratified mother used; but unfortunately in the general impulse of emotion that followed, Arthur could scarcely restrain a slight laugh, which Nancy, who seemed to be all ear, remarked, though no one else noticed it. Why should he laugh? He would not have laughed had it been the old house of Oakley, amid its trees and parks, that was to be rallied round; and why not the small tenement in East Street, Underhayes? Was it possible that materialism could go so far as to measure sentiment by the size of the house? He said this to himself, yet still laughed in his mind, and could not tell why.

"I hope you have written your letters," Nancy said, coldly, as they walked home.

"Yes; the one I specially wanted to write is gone. It was an answer to Mr. Rolt's which I told you about."

"Then you will have no excuse about

writing letters to-mor—I mean another night. You will not have that reason to give for staying away."

"You do not want me to spend every evening at your mother's, Nancy?"

"Ah, now it comes out," she said. "I knew it all along. It was not letters, but because you wanted to escape from us, from my family, whom you look down upon. If you despise them, you should never have married me; for I will stick to them as long as I live."

"I am not in the habit of making lying excuses," said Arthur, as calmly as he could; "and it is not necessary," he added after a pause, controlling the sentiment in his voice, "to despise a family because you do not wish to be with them every night."

"Every night! this is the second night," cried Nancy in high disdain.

"Nancy," said Arthur, "do not let us quarrel. I don't want to interfere with your natural affection, but you cannot expect me to feel exactly as you do. It is not possible! And don't you think it would be wise to agree that there are great differ-

ences between your family and me? that we are likely to agree better apart, and that a meeting now and then would be best, not too often? I don't want to dictate to you—"

"No; it would be more wise, as you say, not to try," said Nancy. "I see now. This is why you wouldn't condescend to look at the other house. Ah, I see! you mean to go away, to leave this place, which is the only place I can be happy in. This is your plan? Oh, I allow it is a fine plan! but it will not be so easy to carry out."

"I don't want, I say, to dictate to you. I don't want you to give up anything that is important for your happiness. But I have given up my people for you, Nancy—"

"Then go back to your people, and have done with it!" cried Nancy, throwing herself free from his arm, to which she had been clinging, and pushing him from her. Arthur was so startled to find himself driven to the edge of the pavement by this energetic impulse, that even the power of speech seemed taken from him. And what was there to say?

CHAPTER XIII.

MR. and Mrs. Arthur Curtis settled down in a day or two into No. 6, Rose Villas, where Nancy had her two maids to manage, and all that had seemed to her most delightful and desirable in life. The little drawing-room was not a particularly genial place in winter weather; the carpet was covered with a white linen cloth tightly strained, there were white muslin curtains at the windows, the walls were white and gold, after the approved fashion of little drawing-rooms in little villas. All this, if it was very clean-looking, as Nancy said, was chilly in December, and the little fireplace was so near the long French window, and both were so near the door, that the room was draughty, and scarcely so

cosy as might have been desired. There was a piano in it, upon which Nancy could not play, though she had received lessons on the piano during those five quarters in which she had been at school; and a work-table, which she did not employ much for work; but no books, nor any pictures on the white-and-gold walls. When Arthur had exerted himself in the re-arrangement of the furniture, which Nancy did not go into with any enthusiasm—for she was still of opinion that a row of chairs set against the wall were "in their proper place," and that to disturb them was almost an immorality—the discovery that he had nothing to do pressed with more and more force upon him. What did he want with anything to do? Nancy thought. Was it not the best thing in the world not to require to do anything, the true sign of being a gentleman? A certain scorn of people who worked for their living had taken possession of Mrs. Arthur Curtis. Why should they give themselves airs when they were all as one as a bricklayer, working for their bread? But anyone could

see that Arthur was a gentleman. It is to be hoped that gentlemen in general were more at their ease under the burden of their gentility than Arthur. It was not—let no one be deceived—that he wanted to work. Work when he had read with Mr. Eagles had been extremely irksome to the young man. It was true he had not remained very long to try it, but he had not loved his studies, especially under the spur of the sharp and urgent "coach." There are other things, however, which young men think of when they talk of having "something to do," which do not tell very much in an industrial point of view. In his natural condition and at home, Arthur had many occupations. He shot, he hunted, he rode about the country, he paid visits; he was appealed to by people in trouble; he was consulted about the affairs of the estate. Sometimes he had to appear on the hustings in support of his father's election; he had speeches to make now and then, and that interest in public business which is indispensable to one who may sometimes have to take part in it. All this was at an end now. The calm, not to stay stagnation

of his present existence dropped over him as the curtain drops in a theatre upon the animated and busy scene. After the drama is over, or in the moment of repose between its acts, it is some immoveable representation of life or scenery, an unchangeable incident or landscape, that closes for us the brilliant stage upon which human life in all its changeableness and variety of emotion has been represented. Arthur's domestic bliss was like this drop scene. His life was gone from him, with all its hopes and occupations; he was no longer the young Squire, as potent within his small territory as any Prince of Wales, no longer the budding magnate of the county, with responsibilities rising round him, with the covers to think of (if nothing more), and poachers to take in hand, and public life to look forward to. All that fuller existence had departed. The drop scene, representing a white-and-gold bower of bliss, with two figures seated (before the fire, but that was a matter of detail), all in all to each other, as romantic people say, had fallen with a remorseless completeness, hiding everything. He took a long walk

with his wife every afternoon. Often he went out in the evening to fetch her from her father's, or else he had the pleasure of entertaining her father and mother at home; and he would stroll out on his own account here and there, in the mornings, while Nancy was pretending to do her housekeeping, or read the *Times* languidly in the room appropriated to him, feeling as if all the busy commotion of the world indicated in it had gone away to such a distance from him that he could but faintly apprehend or understand it. The drop scene! To what innocent bosom would not that picture have commended itself? Two figures, young and fair to behold, the world forgetting, by the world forgot; living for each other, all for love, and the world well lost.

This went on for what was really a long time without disturbance. The establishment of the Arthur Curtises in Rose Villas gave the little world of Underhayes many causes of deliberation. Should they call? was a question hotly discussed. Call? on Bates the tax-collector's daughter! Could

anything be more absurd? the elder ladies said. But the younger ones were interested; who would not be interested in such a romantic business? and the gentlemen were either sorry for or curious about the young husband who had thus sacrificed everything to "a pretty face." For the girl was just an uneducated girl like any other in her position, everybody said. There was no innate superiority in Nancy to justify her elevation, neither had her husband taken pains as even a romantic young fool, now and then, did, to educate her before making her his wife. Even now, so far as anyone knew, no attempt was being made to qualify Mrs. Arthur for her husband's position in society. They had settled at Rose Villas, avowedly that she might be near her mother—with whom she was said to spend half her time; and no judicious governess or master able to impart instruction in those accomplishments which must have been wanting in her, was ever seen to enter her gates. Not even trying to improve her mind! She got the pick of the novels which came

in Mudie's box to the local library, in right of an unusually liberal subscription; but what could novels do for her? Under these circumstances, it became a doubly difficult question to know what to do. When she came home at first she had been very well dressed, which had made an impression in her favour. Her dark blue "silk" had filled the Green with admiration and envy. "Paris, of course!" the ladies said, who, notwithstanding their disapproval of such a marriage, were very curious indeed about the bride; and some added a joke or a sigh at the idea of putting delicate garments from Paris, not upon such as themselves, who could appreciate them, but upon Nancy Bates! However, this mingled approbation and disdain soon came to an end, for it was not long before the dark blue silk was thrown aside in favour of more showy garments. "If that is all they can do in Paris!" Sarah Jane had said, at the sight of it, and she had spent some time at a milliner's in town and ought to know. Her own family all thought Nancy's dresses

dowdy, and ridiculously quiet for a bride; and the original "silk" which her parents had given her had been brought to the front again, with others of a similar character.

"I made myself a dowdy to please Arthur. He likes it," said Nancy; "but one can't go on humouring one's husband for ever, can one, mamma? One must think for one's self sooner or later, and ladies surely know best about their own dress."

Arthur had not attempted any remonstrance, what was the use? And Nancy had reappeared with a brightness of colour and breadth of ornament, which pleased her family a great deal better.

"Now you look something like a newly-married lady, with a husband that grudges you nothing," Mrs. Bates said proudly, on that day when the Green shuddered at Mrs. Arthur's new costume, and resolved with one mind, now at least, that nobody could be expected to call. But such resolutions did not always overcome the stronger inducements of curiosity, or of that pity and interest which moved some bosoms. Mrs.

Eagles was the first to break the reserve. Her husband insisted upon it, she said. And she not only called, but asked "the Arthur Curtises" to dinner. Mrs. Eagles was a mild little woman, as soft-voiced as her husband was peremptory. She avowed frankly that she had been "very fond" of Arthur while he lived in her house. "He was so nice, he never would give any trouble that he could help, so unlike your *parvenus;* he was always so ready to do anything for you. Yes, I was very fond of him. The pupils are not attractive as a rule, but young Mr. Curtis was charming." This was what she said to her neighbours when it was known that she had asked the bride to dinner, the boldest thing that had been done on the Green for many a day.

"I hope you found *her* charming, too," said the Vicar's wife, who was not disposed to compromise her dignity in such a way. Mrs. Eagles took a little time to answer the question, and cleared her throat.

"She is—quite unformed—I almost

wonder that associating with a well-bred man should have had so little effect upon her manners. But then, she is natural—she has no affectations; that is always something," said Mrs. Eagles, which was not the case with the Vicar's wife. She did not, however, ask the dignified couple from the vicarage, but only a humbler newly married curate to meet the young pair, who, for their part, were thrown into considerable excitement by the invitation. How Nancy might have taken it on her own account is doubtful; but the delight of her family had driven all thoughts from her mind but those of delightful elevation in the world and entrance into society.

"It's only a schoolmaster, it is true," said Mrs. Bates; "no better, indeed not so good as ourselves, for I never was brought to such a pass that I had to take in lodgers to interfere with the family. I always was able to keep ourselves to ourselves, and of course the pupils are all the same as lodgers; but still you'll meet the real gentry there, my pet, and it will be

a beginning, and you needn't be shy with people like them." Thus encouraged, Nancy allowed herself to feel that to go out to a party was pleasant. For she too, though she had the distractions of her family and her housekeeping, was growing a little tired perhaps of the drop scene.

They were all very indignant, however, when Arthur suggested that she should wear a simple white dress for this first appearance. White, like an unmarried girl! and as if her husband was not well enough off to afford her a "silk!" Finally, with great hurry and strain of all their efforts to get it ready in time, Nancy appeared in light blue, which was becoming enough, though rather incomplete in those finishing touches which mark the difference between a home-made garment and one which has come from the hands of the initiated. As for Arthur he laughed at himself, not without a little bitterness, as he made his simple toilet. He was pleased to be asked out to dinner by his former "coach." It excited him vaguely, partly with pleasure, partly with

anxiety. It was "revisiting the glimpses of the moon," for the first time for all these months; for the slow winter had crept round to March again, and all the world was stirring into life. To describe the kind of Christmas this poor young fellow had spent would be too much for ordinary powers—exiled as he was from everything belonging to himself, and driven into close, too close encounter with all the jollities of so different a sphere. He had borne them, and kept them at arm's length, as far as he could, and thank heaven, they were over. But the impatience in his heart grew stronger as the days grew longer, and the world turned to spring. He was as glad of Mr. Eagles' invitation as if the "coach" had been Prime Minister with all manner of advantages to bestow. That impetuous little personage could not, had he gained first places for all his pupils in all the examinations under the sun, have put himself in the same position with the son of such a rural magnate as Sir John Curtis; but Arthur was as glad of his notice and his wife's notice, as if the

level of the Bates family had been his own original level. Nevertheless, there were difficulties in launching Nancy even into this mild little scholastic world. Arthur did not feel that he could venture to give her those hints about the manners of ordinary society, which might have steered her safely through the not appalling dangers of a dinner party. He did what he could by way of suggestion and supposition, taking it for granted that she would know; but even that simple mode of communicating instruction aroused her suspicions. "Oh, you needn't be afraid, I know how to behave myself," she said, with a toss of her head. How did she know—was it by instinct? instinct is a doubtful guide through the usages of society; but anyhow, Arthur did not venture to say any more. When she came downstairs, however, ready to start, with her blue dress all decorated and looped up with orange-blossoms, Arthur made a determined stand. He said, "You must take those things off, they are ridiculous," with a peremptoriness which she could not resist,

saucy as she was. Arthur at this moment did not seem a person to be trifled with. "Do you want to make a laughing-stock of your sister?" the young man said, confounding them all; and the obnoxious decorations were taken off with a silent speed that was wonderful. It was wonderful, as being inspired by a mysterious sense of having made a mistake. They had no idea what the mistake was; and their pride would not permit them to ask enlightenment; but they felt it the more from its mysterious and unknown character. When Nancy was ready, and wrapped in the warm white *sortie du bal* which they had bought in Paris, the effect of this error was sufficiently obliterated; and the young husband's heart swelled with a little pride when he presented her to the man who had sent him out of his house because of Nancy. That practical protestation had not done much more good than all the other efforts which had been made to sever Arthur from his love; and here she was now, fair and blooming, an unquestionable fact, which they were

all compelled to recognize. But as he left her in charge of Mrs. Eagles, and dropped off behind, what anxiety was in Arthur's thoughts! It was her first essay in society; would she take the trouble to please? He stood furtively watching her as he talked to the Curate, whose wife was also on her trial, but caused him no such tremour. The Curate's wife was a small young lady of ordinary breeding and appearance, not to be compared with Nancy in any possible respect. But she had been born a clergyman's, not a tax-collector's daughter. She knew the outside of social ways, and how not to commit herself, which was exactly what Nancy did not know.

And it must be allowed that, when Arthur saw that only this Curate and his wife had been invited to meet them, he was wroth with a savage sort of anger and scornful humiliation. He gave no sign of his feelings; but he had been accustomed to be somebody wherever he went, and the sense that he had now dropped into a doubtful position, in which only

the Curate could be supposed likely to countenance him, gave him a sense of what had befallen him more sharp and sudden than anything else that had happened, even than the familiarities of the Bates family. To say that Nancy was angry too, would be little. Her whole soul rose up in a blaze of wrath. She had expected to see everything that was fine and famous on the Green, and to receive, in a way, the homage of the assembled aristocracy. Nobody with a title lived at Underhayes, and Nancy considered that she herself had all but a title, and was to be admired in proportion; yet there was no one here but the little Curate's wife. She talked largely to Mr. Eagles during dinner, giving him her opinion of Society in England.

"Of course being brought up in a place like this, I have seen but little; and here not much to speak of," she said, with a frankness that prepossessed her host—himself so trenchant and decided at all times.

"You are right, very right, Mrs. Curtis.

The people about here are not much to speak of. We have to put up with it, for we can get no better. Retired people are mostly a set of nuisances; having done all the mischief they can in the world in their own persons, they revile everybody who is beginning, and put mischief into their heads."

"Yes, Dr. Eagles." He was called Doctor by the common people about, and he did not like it. "Yes; there never was such a gossiping place, I've heard many people say. They have nothing to do themselves, and they pull everybody to pieces. I have never gone into it, but I can't abide that sort of thing. They are so stuck up; don't you think they are dreadfully stuck up? and what is there in them to make them better than their neighbours? Don't you think so, Dr. Eagles? I do hate everything like that," said Nancy, energetically. "I suppose you did not like to ask them to meet Arthur and me?"

"I—I don't ask anyone," said Mr. Eagles, taken aback for the moment. "It is my wife that asks the people." Then

he began to realize that getting out of a difficulty by putting it upon his wife, was not a noble proceeding. "The fact is, I don't think anyone was asked. We thought, I suppose, that you didn't care for it. I don't myself; I hope Curtis is not giving up work altogether. He may be tempted to do so, having no immediate object, but he ought never to interrupt his course of study. He was getting on very well with me."

"What should he go on with his studies for?" said Nancy; "he does not require it to make a living. He may please himself what he does. Oh, I shouldn't like my husband to have to work! When a man is born a gentleman, Dr. Eagles—"

"You have been good enough to bestow a degree upon me to which I have no right," said Mr. Eagles. "I am simple Mr., like all the rest, though I am obliged to work for my living, and it would be of use to me. A man ought to work, however, when he's young like Curtis. If he doesn't now, he will miss it after. I've always told him so."

"I am sure I don't think so at all," said Nancy. "Why should he work? or

anyone in the position of a gentleman? You know what I mean by a gentleman. Father is as good as Arthur, or anyone, and he has to work."

This mollified Mr. Eagles.

"I hope we are all gentlemen," he said, as lightly as was possible for him, "whether we work or not."

"Oh yes, in a kind of a way," said Nancy, with careless scorn, "in your manners, and so forth. And clergymen, and teachers, and those sort of people are called so out of civility; but I never think anybody is a gentleman that has his own living to make."

"I think you are a little hard upon us, Mrs. Curtis," said the Curate, with a smile.

"Oh, I di[illegible].'t mean to be hard," said Nancy. "You are just as good as anyone else. Those that have plenty to live on are the best off, but I don't say that I despise those that have to work. They are good enough in their way. It isn't their fault they were born as they are, nor was it any virtue in my husband to be born Arthur Curtis. He couldn't help it, neither can you."

Thus Nancy vanquished the adversary at the dinner-table. When the ladies went back to the drawing-room, which was not till a late hour, for it took a long time to make Nancy understand Mrs. Eagles' little nods and signs from the other end of the table—but when they got upstairs at last, the Curate's wife benevolently interfered to set Nancy at her ease after this mistake.

"I daresay you have been used to the French way of the men coming upstairs along with the ladies; and a far better plan it is, I think."

Nancy looked coolly at the questioner. She was more comfortable when Arthur's eyes were not upon her, watching everything she said and did.

"I didn't make any mistake," she said, "but gentlemen's conversation is the best, isn't it? I wanted to have as much as I could of that. I didn't want to be left to women's society — three petticoats together," and she laughed with insolent meaning. Nancy had read a great many novels, and she knew that these were the sentiments generally attributed to a heroine, and she was determined that there

should be nothing in her mind which she would not have the courage to say.

"I hope we shall not be so very tiresome to you," said Mrs. Eagles, with an involuntary glance at the other. "We hear you have been in Paris, Mrs. Curtis. You must have enjoyed that. It is always so bright and gay."

"I did not think it was gay at all," said Nancy, "a very stupid place. Everybody talked so queerly, not at all like the French one learns at school; and they have such queer dishes, and altogether they are so queer. Have you been in Paris? I did not find it at all gay."

"There are so many things to see," Mrs. Eagles suggested.

"Oh, what sort of things to see! Places where things have happened that nobody knows anything about, or if one ever heard of them one has forgotten. I don't call that amusing," said Nancy. "There are very handsome shops, but I did not care much for French taste, do you? they are so fond of dingy colours; nothing clean-looking nor bright. I was so glad to get back to England."

"So was I," said the Curate's wife, "when we were abroad; but I thought it all *so* interesting. I did enjoy it when we were there. The very names of the places that one had read about in history!"

"I never read history," said Nancy, carelessly. "I like to see things happening now; and nothing seemed to happen, but just hearing about old dusty rubbish. Oh, yes, the streets were nice. Arthur says that in summer there are races, and amusements, and concerts out of doors, and all that sort of thing, but it was too cold when we were there. I went to hear the men speaking in Parliament, but it was dull; what is the good of listening to long speeches? One of Arthur's friends took us—Sir John Denham—you may have heard of him. He was always offering us boxes for the theatre, but that was dull too."

"I am afraid you were difficult to please," said Mrs. Eagles; but the Curate's wife began to listen with a certain interest. It is always pleasant to hear familiarly about the Sir Johns of this world.

"Yes, they all said I was difficult to

please," said Nancy, sweeping out of the chair she had just chosen, and nearly knocking down a small table on which stood a lamp. "Did you get your furniture from town, Mrs. Eagles? Did you have one of the tip-top upholsterers to do it, or did you pick up things cheap?"

"I am afraid we tried as much as we could to pick up things cheap," said Mrs. Eagles, restraining the inclination to laugh which was gaining upon her. The other young woman was listening anxiously, seeing no fun in it, and their entertainer thought she liked Mrs. Arthur best.

"I thought so," said Nancy, calmly, fixing her eyes upon an Italian cabinet which was the pride of the house, "but I should just put my house into the hands of some tip-top man. I don't like making up with part old and part new. I shall have everything of the best and the newest fashion," she said, looking round with a delightful glow of complaisant superiority. But then she was Sir John Curtis's daughter-in-law, and Mrs. Eagles was but a schoolmaster's wife.

CHAPTER XIV.

"PARTY! it was no party at all!" said Nancy, "I have just been giving Arthur a piece of my mind. If he thinks I am going to take the trouble to have a dress made, and go out among folks I don't know, to meet the Curate and his wife! why, we are just as good as they are! or rather, I should say, a deal better." She was sitting over the fire next morning, by no means pleased with her entertainment. Now, indeed, was the time when she felt it most—for it had been sweet to think of dazzling her mother and sisters with an account of the grand ladies of the Green; and there was nothing now to comment upon, save poor little Mrs. Curate in her muslin frock! Arthur was

in the room behind, shut off with folding doors from this; and she spoke loud that he might have the benefit of her remarks.

"The Curate!" said Mrs. Bates, "my dear, it's no compliment, it's an insult to ask you; as if you are not good enough to meet the best."

"That is just what I said. I tell Arthur, if he were to stick up for me as he ought, nobody would dare to treat me like that. I consider," said Nancy, "that we paid those Eagles a great compliment going; and to meet the Curate! as if we were not good enough to sit down with the finest folks in this wretched little hole of a place."

"The Curate is a very nice young man," said Sarah Jane. "I should not mind him a bit. *I* call him handsome; but then he's married," she added with lessened satisfaction. "And so are you married, so it comes to the same thing. I dare say they thought as you were both young couples—"

"I wish you would think a little what you're saying," said Nancy. "Me! and

her! a bit of a girl in white muslin! with a hundred and fifty a year, at the outside, to live on; and obliged to work hard among the poor, as hard as if she was a curate too—and me!"

"Yes, indeed, there is no comparison," said Mrs. Bates. "For shame, Sarah Jane! But, Nancy, you mustn't forget that your sister has chosen her lot very different. John Raisins is an excellent young man; but he can't open the doors of high life to her, as Arthur can open them to you. And it's best that she should make up her mind to what she can have—not hanker after what she can't. It's very different, my darling child, with you."

"I am sure I don't know if it's different," said Nancy. "He hasn't opened many doors to me yet, and I think he'd shut your door if he could, which is the only one that's left. Oh, why do girls marry? they are a deal better, if they could only think it, at home." And with this Nancy began to cry.

Arthur heard everything in the next

room. He had himself felt the change in his position sorely on the previous night; and Mr. Eagles' sharp, yet somewhat mournful adjurations to him not to lose his time, to go on with his work, to do something, had intensified the effect. He had come upstairs early enough to hear the style of Nancy's conversation with the two ladies, and this also had touched him deeply. What is more painful than to see those whom we love giving what, to our eyes, is a false representation of themselves to the outside world, which does not know them? Arthur felt this tingle to his very finger-points — a painful shame; her foolish rudeness, and the wrong which she did herself by this misrepresentation had made him miserable. If they could but see her as he knew her—as she was on other occasions? This, he said to himself, was not Nancy; it was a foolish braggart of the village, the type of the Bates family, not his wife, who was as much above the Bates in fine taste and perception as she was in beauty. To be sure, her taste had not lately told

for very much. But that had been the influence of the uncomfortable position in which she had felt herself, or of her connections, whom she had so unfortunately insisted on coming back to. The pain had been exquisite with which Arthur watched his bride through this first appearance in society. It brought back to him the feelings which he had tried to forget, with which he had come in upon the violent termination of her interview with Mrs. Anthony Curtis. Was there nothing he could do, or say, which would persuade her that this was not the way to meet strangers who might turn out to be friends? He was sitting unhappy enough over his fire, having taken out a book or two, which lay on the table beside the "Times," the usual occupation of his aimless morning. He had been trying to "read" as Mr. Eagles understood reading; but what were Demosthenes and Cicero to him? He could not go back now, and toil over the intricacies of language and argument which wanted all his attention ceaselessly, with happy

ease of mind, not with painful preoccupation of it, as he had pursued those studies in their earlier stages. He had never been a hard student, and why should he read now? What good would it do him? Would all the reading in the world, or his degree, when he had taken it, restore him to the world in which his wife could not accompany him, and would not try to accompany him, and where he could not go without her? He had been sitting dreamily over the fire, thinking it all over. The vague plan in his mind had been when Nancy was a little better prepared for it, a little more likely to incline in her own mind towards it, and willing to try to make the experiment successful, to take her home and present her to his father and mother, hoping that the surprise and the pleasure of his own return might procure them a welcome; this is what he had thought of even when he had written formal letters to Sir John, and those brief notes to Lucy or his mother, in which there was no reference to Nancy. When he could get her guided to that point—

when he could feel that she could bear the trial, then to go. It had been his hope all through, a something vaguely looked forward to, though never brought down to any settled moment of time. But, alas! it had receded before him point by point. Nancy was not willing to do anything to please. She was of opinion that by herself, without any effort, she ought to rule easily over a subject world. She felt herself—not as he did, to be upon the painful threshold of an unexplored country, full of perils, in which all her efforts were needed to find herself a place—but rather to have conquered all that could be put in her way and attained every object—with the exception of the homage of those "stuck up" and disagreeable people, who were envious of her, and therefore would not pay her the attention to which she had a right, and whom Nancy would scorn to do anything to conciliate. What a difference between their points of view! And he who ought to have been the strongest, who was infinitely better educated, and more reasonable than Nancy, he was

powerless to convey any other conviction to her mind; although she succeeded in agitating his with all sorts of tumults, with shame that she should show her worse qualities, and earn the disapproval she incurred—yet with hot resentment towards those who disapproved of her. Such sentiments are not unusual in human bosoms. Husbands feel so for their wives, and wives for their husbands, and parents for their children. Why will they show themselves at their worst to make strangers laugh, or wonder, or despise; and at the same time, how do they dare, these strangers, to despise, or laugh, or wonder? A more painful conflict of feeling cannot be.

This was what Arthur was thinking, sitting drearily, not among the ruins of his domestic happiness, but before the sunny, common-place, too trimly new and flimsy altar of those capricious deities who rule the hearth. He had not yet been six months married: but how the bloom had gone off all his hopes, and with how little confidence he regarded the future, which

once had seemed to him so bright! And as he sat there, with his books thrown down at his elbow, and the "Times" thrust away from him upon the table, with a sort of loathing in his mind both of the studies which could now, he thought, do him no good if he returned to them, and of the public life, once certain, which now seemed to have become impossible and undesirable, he heard Mrs. Bates and Sarah Jane come in and the conversation that followed. Even now Arthur had sense enough (and it was creditable to him) to throw himself into no vulgar vituperation of his mother-in-law. The woman was well enough; she was kind, and almost fierce in independence, taking nothing from him, giving not receiving hospitality, and in no way disposed to encourage his wife in anything disagreeable to him. It was not Mrs. Bates that was in fault, but Nancy herself—she who had seemed to him such a lily of grace and sweetness among all these common-place people. She was so still, he believed; she was not like them, who were natural to their sphere, and suggested

nothing better. He was faithful notwithstanding all imperfections to his first ideal of her; but her words thrilled through and through him, scarring him as with burning arrows. "He had not opened any doors to her. Oh, why did girls marry!" was this what his wife asked after five months of marriage with him? Arthur's veins seemed to fill full as if some essence of pain had been poured into them. He darted up overcome by sharp misery and shame, and a passionate resentment which he could not restrain. It took him but a a moment to throw open the folding-doors. If one minute more had elapsed, it would have brought a second thought, but there was no interval in which this was possible. He threw open the door and stood looking at her, for the moment too tremulous and agitated to speak. She had put shame upon him before those women who were the only visitors she cared for. When she saw him, Nancy jumped up too and confronted him.

"Well?" she said, loudly, with a sharp and tremulous voice of interrogation. What had he to say for himself? She had

said nothing which she was not ready to stand to, which she would not defend with all her powers. No one had ever known Nancy to flinch. However hot and hasty had been her assertions, however lightly said, she had always stood up for them; and to such a palpable challenge and trumpet call to conflict, it was not likely she would give in now.

He stood and looked at her for a moment almost wavering. It was not the first time she had said such things, why should he resent it so much more than usual?

"Did you mean that?" he said. "Do you really think that I have closed doors but opened none, and that girls would not marry if they knew—"

"I said it, therefore I must have meant it," cried Nancy, with a flush of angry red. "If you sit and listen to what women are saying! But I never say anything I will not stand to. Yes: what door have you opened to me, Arthur? it was mother's words first. Not your father and mother's, which was the first to

be thought of, nor any of your friends'; but mother's has always been open to you."

"Oh, hush, hush!" cried Mrs. Bates. "Oh, children, you don't know what you're doing. Why should you quarrel? Nancy, hold your tongue—you'll be sorry after that you ever said a word."

"Not I!" cried Nancy. "I am not one to bottle things up. I'll say it out plain before you both, and you can be my witness, mother. When I knew Arthur first, I never thought what he was. Gentleman or poor man it was all one to me. He was my fancy, and that was all I thought of. When that man came, that Durant, then I began to see what I was bringing on me; but it was too late to draw back. And I said to myself, I'd let him see it wasn't his money I wanted, and that I'd never kootoo to one of his grand friends. And I never have," she cried, with angry energy, "and I never will. You've opened no doors to me—nor I don't want you to; but you shan't think that it's been a grand thing for me to marry you, neither you nor anyone belong-

ing to you. It hasn't. You'd separate me from my own people if you could, and you don't give me any other; and I say again, if girls only knew—"

"Mrs. Bates," said Arthur, with trembling lips. "I do not think I have tried to separate your daughter from you. I may defend myself so far as this; and I had hoped that some time or other she would have gone with me to knock at that door which you upbraid me with not having opened. But what am I to do if, as she tells you, she never will? she never has shown the slightest inclination to do so, that is the truth indeed."

"It was them that should have come to her—that's what she thinks," said Mrs. Bates, "and she's hot-tempered. You know she's hot-tempered. She don't mean half of what she says. Oh, don't now, don't quarrel, children!" cried the mother. In the *mêlée* Sarah Jane thought she might as well take a part too.

"I don't wonder that Nancy was affronted. That stuck up Miss Curtis coming with her 'dear Arthur's,' and her 'dear brother's,' and taking no notice, no more

than if we were cabbages, of us; but as for Nancy not thinking of who he was, and that it was a grand marriage, oh, didn't she just! You may tell that to those that will believe it, you had better not tell it to me."

"You nasty, spiteful, tale-telling disagreeable thing!" cried Nancy, furious, turning upon her sister, who laughed in her face, and ran round in fright, which was half real, half pretended, to the other side of the round table. Arthur stood aghast while this playful episode, so much out of keeping with his feelings, went on. It was out of keeping to Nancy too. No smile came upon her face. "I thought it was a great marriage I was making, if you please," she said, after she too had paused with the sense of a crisis, and stared at her sister's pretended sportiveness. No smile relaxed the lips of either of the contending pair. "I thought so, you may say it. I thought I should be a lady, and mix with the best in the land; what's come of it? Have I ever set foot among the folks you belong to, or their

kind? No, I said the truth, there's no door been open to me—the other way! You would shut mother's door upon me if you could, you would keep me away from my own folks—the only friends I have. But you'll never do it, Arthur, you may as well give it up at once. I'll stick to them that's good to me, and I won't stir a step to court your people, nor to curry favour—no, not if you would ask me on your knees. I wrote to my lady, because I promised, but my lady wouldn't make much of my letter; and never will I make myself so cheap again, never if I should live hundreds of years."

"Nancy, Nancy, my child!" cried her mother, "you must not make rash vows. You don't know what you'll do till the time comes. She's hot-tempered. That's all about. And if Arthur will say he is sorry—"

"What shall I say I am sorry for, Mrs. Bates?"

"Oh, now this is too bad. Don't you see it will please her? She always was a bit unreasonable and high-tempered. You

can't help your temper, it's a thing that's born with you. Say you're sorry, and smooth her down a little, and she'll soon come round and promise anything you like. I know my Nancy. She is hot-headed, and she's contrairy, but her heart's in the right place," said the mother. Mrs. Bates was frightened by the contraction in Arthur's face.

"I have nothing to be sorry for," he said. "I have made no accusations against anyone; but I cannot always give in. I have come here to please her, and she is not pleased. Let us go away. Let Nancy second me in my attempt to get back into a natural life. It is not natural that I should be cooped up here, doing nothing, wasting my time. I must get out of it somehow. Either you will go with me, Nancy, or I must go alone. I cannot go on in this way any longer."

"You shan't then!" she cried, with redoubled heat. "Go—wherever you like for me. Oh, yes, go back to your family that you're so fond of. You and your friends do nothing but despise me, even a

bit of a schoolmaster's wife! Don't hold me, don't keep me back, mamma. I'll not be left, whatever happens; it's me that will go, and he can do what he pleases. Don't I tell you! Nobody shall hold me, nobody shall keep me in one place rather than another against my will. But I shan't stay to be forsaken. Oh, don't think it, Arthur! It's me that will go."

"I have said nothing about forsaking you," he said; but he was wearied out with such struggles, and he made no appeal to her to stay. This decided Nancy. She rushed impetuously from the room, leaving them all staring at each other, without giving a word of explanation. Mrs. Bates, whose face was somewhat blank, called to Sarah Jane to follow her sister, and herself turned to Arthur with an attempt at a smile.

"It will soon be over now," she said. "You mustn't be hard upon her, Arthur. For all we know, there may be something working with her that she can't resist. Young women have queer ways, and you can't tell what's the cause of it till after.

Don't you mind; go back to your books, there's a dear, and take no notice. She'll have a good cry, and she'll come to herself, and you mustn't mind."

It was not this address that quieted him; but what could he do? The position was so impossible that he was glad to withdraw from it. It was worse than ever, now that one of these altercations had taken place before witnesses; he went back sadly to his fire and sat down again, blaming himself for the exasperation which had made him speak. Probably Mrs. Bates was right, and it was all over. She might come downstairs, looking as if nothing had happened, or she might come down penitent, as she sometimes did; and this got the better of him at once. But anyhow, he would not insist upon continuing the altercation, he was too glad that it was over. He sat down, sighing, and drearily drew towards him the Demosthenes that lay on the table. How unimportant all that dead eloquence was, side by side with living passion! The petty stir of domestic dissensions was too near to let him hear

the ring of the old disputations, the flow and flood of the old eloquence. Nancy's voice, in all the warmth of passion, rang more clear on the ear than the greatest of orators. He sat with his nerves all thrilling, and his mind vainly striving to get a little instruction through his eyes. Those eyes read easily enough, hot though they were with the strain they had been subjected to, but the mind received no impression. It was more busy in his ears, listening to what was going on. He heard the hasty sound of Nancy's footstep upstairs; then he heard her come down, and there were voices in the little hall, confused and undertoned, one voice mingling with another; and then there was the sound of the hall-door closing. He sat after this with a strange sensation, as if that sound of the door had jarred him in every limb. He did not seem able to move to see what it was. But the stillness that fell upon the little house was ominous. Instead of the excited voices which had been audible a little while ago, filling the place with contention, what a strange deadly

sort of quiet! Arthur was wearied out. So many vicissitudes of feeling had not occurred in all his previous life as had come to him within these five months past. Happiness, delight, disappointment, vexation, irritated nerves, wounded affection, mortified pride, and that combination of impassioned love and disenchanted vision which is of all things in the world the hardest to bear. How different, how different from his anticipations! How lightly the lovers' quarrels had gone off, quenched in tears and smiles, and mutual confessions and warmer fondness. "The falling out of faithful friends renewing is of love." But then that must not go too far, or continue too long, and the shiver of hot shame which she had brought over him so often, the uncertainty as to how she would acquit herself which was always present, the passionate mortification with which he had seen other people's smiles, or heard other people's comments, all these were very different from the lovers' quarrels. He held his Demosthenes steadily in his hand, and attempted to read. How far off it

was! and the other so near; and of all the things that can occupy a man's ear, what is so absorbing as the dead silence of vacancy after a struggle which has threatened everything, and had ended in—what? Nothing, silence, vacancy, probably bringing no consequence at all.

Nancy did not come in at the hour of luncheon. He waited for her, refusing that refreshment until it was clear she did not mean to come back. Then he swallowed a glass of wine hastily, and prepared in his turn to go out—not to seek her. He was resolved that this time, at least, she should be left in tranquillity, left to do what pleased her best. He had just gone into the hall to get his hat when some one came to the door. How his heart jumped! and how sick it grew again when it turned out to be only Mr. Eagles, who had come to make a serious remonstrance.

"You oughtn't to lose your time," the "coach" said, bending his brows. "If you can't do anything better, you should come back to me. The old set are still hard at work, and there are two or three new men

that will make their mark. It can't be lively here, doing nothing. Why, you've nothing to do, not even fishing or football, eh? I never hear of you playing football. What do you do?"

"Nothing," said Arthur; "and I can't say I like it; but what's the good? I am too old for football and that sort of thing."

"Ah, four-and-twenty, that's a great age; but I know what you mean. Married! there's the rub—feel yourself too grand for it. But look here, Curtis. A man can't live with nothing to do."

"The wonder to me is how long a man can live with nothing to do," said Arthur. "But as I say, what's the good? I'm too old now to care about my degree. What does it matter, one way or the other? I have got beyond that stage."

"Married, again!" said Mr. Eagles; "that is what drives me wild—not the fact, which is harmless enough; but Lord, how grand you all think yourselves! However, it don't last. You can't feed upon strawberries and cream all your lives, my dear fellow. You must buckle to at some-

thing, or you will be nobody. I don't like anyone who has passed through my hands to be nobody. You had better read, Curtis, you had better read."

"Yes," said Arthur, vaguely.

He was quite willing to pledge himself to anything so long as Mr. Eagles would but go away, and leave him to listen and make sure if anyone came: or get out into the air and distract his mind from listening. One or the other, he felt, he must do.

"The best thing will be to come back to me," said Mr. Eagles; "at least you won't lose your time completely, and you'll find it a relief. Too many sweets will pall upon you; take them in measure and they are delightful enough. Come, Curtis, I make you an offer I needn't say, for you know, that I don't require to go hunting for pupils; but, my good fellow, for your own sake you had better come back."

"Yes," said Arthur, with a sudden lightening and ease which diffused itself all over him. There was another sound at the door; and this time it must, there

could be no doubt, be Nancy. This relief made it possible for him to listen. His countenance cleared. He had not really known what his fears were, but he felt the vague greatness of them in this sense of immediate ease and relief.

But all the blood rushed to his head again, and the pulses began to beat in his brow when the door opened, and not Nancy appeared, but the maid, showing in the unexpected, and in the circumstances, alarming figure of Durant.

CHAPTER XV.

"THERE is something wrong at home!" This most natural of all the ideas with which foreboding human nature sees a sudden arrival, sprang to Arthur's lips almost in spite of himself. He was already so torn by anxiety and alarm that it seemed perfectly appropriate that other griefs should come to distract him, and he scarcely understood the eager "No" with which Durant replied. It was not till they were seated together, one at each side of the fire—Mr. Eagles having taken his departure—that Arthur realized that the burning confusion and pain in his head arose from the fact that his wife had gone out in a fit of passion a few hours ago and had not yet come back, not so very serious a

matter—and was not owing to any suddenly heard of calamity, at home.

"No, things are all well, but I have something to say to you, Arthur," said Durant. And he began a long commission, which Arthur heard vaguely and did not understand. It was to the effect that the post of attaché to a foreign embassy which the young man had wished for, was open to him, and this was coupled with overtures from the parents whose hearts were yearning over Arthur. Probably there is after all nothing so well calculated as long silence to wear out the indignation and resentment of fathers and mothers. However hot these may be at first, the blank misery of knowing nothing about a child beloved, damps and quenches the ardour of offence, and in a great many cases the cruel son or daughter has his or her will out of the sheer intolerableness of this break, and anxiety of the tender hearts on whom this unfeeling passiveness tells more severely than any more actively offensive treatment. This had been working for all these months at Oakley. Hearing

nothing! it was almost worse than death, of which this miserable certainty that we shall hear no more of those we have lost, is the greatest bitterness—tempered, however, with the counterbalancing certainty which alone makes us capable of bearing it, that human events are over to them, and that none of the calamities with which we are familiar can happen to those who are beyond the veil. But the Curtises knew that anything or everything might be happening to Arthur, while they had no news of him, and were as ignorant of all his ways as if he had been dead. And when the information came of this vacancy which he had desired so much, the opportunity was not to be resisted. They had said nothing about it to each other for twenty-four hours, and then had burst forth the universal feeling. Let him accept this, and let him come home and bring his wife, if no better might be. She had been insolent, what did it matter? She was the price that must be paid for Arthur; and the moment it became possible to have Arthur, they all felt that they were too

ready to pay any price. Lady Curtis had telegraphed for Durant when the general conviction burst forth, and the household at Oakley were now full of excitement, already beginning to prepare rooms for Arthur and his wife, and forgetting all other feelings in the pleasure of seeing their boy again. Durant had lost no time. He was too faithful a friend to consider that Arthur had all but repulsed his friendly offices after the marriage, and that not a word of recollection had reached him from Underhayes during the entire winter. He went down to Oakley at once to receive his commission, and here he was with full credentials. The father and mother made no conditions. If Arthur accepted this appointment, which was the best thing he could do, let him come home and bring his wife. That was all. And it may be supposed that Durant, feeling himself the bearer of proposals both generous and tender, was startled and affronted by the confused and preoccupied way in which Arthur seemed to listen, not understanding him, starting at every sound

outside, continually disturbed, and with a look of nervous agitation which had evidently nothing to do with the question in hand.

"Do you not understand me?" he cried at last, indignant: and then the rising excitement in Arthur's mind burst forth.

"Durant, my wife has gone away to her mother's. I—I can't answer all at once."

"What do you mean, Arthur? How disturbed you look! Has anything happened?" cried Durant. Arthur made an effort to recover himself. He laughed tremulously.

"You know me, Lewis," he said, "I am a—nervous sort of fellow, though I don't look it perhaps."

"I know. There *is* something the matter, Arthur. What is it? Is your wife ill? What has happened?"

"Well—nothing has happened. I have been living rather a solitary life, and one gets irritable—and easily put out."

"You have had a—difficulty, as the Americans call it—a lover's quarrel," said

Durant, with a laugh, which was far from according with his feelings.

"That is just it. No, not a lover's quarrel, but a difficulty. We see things from different points of view; and I don't know how she will like this, I must wait. I cannot decide until I know."

"Arthur, it is all very well, all very right to consult your wife; but you can't think of neglecting such an opportunity. It is altogether unconditional. They will receive her, as if she were a Duke's daughter; you know, when once they have made up their minds to it, there will be no stint, she will have no reason to complain of her reception."

Arthur's head was turned to the door.

"You will think me silly," he said; "a fool! but I cannot help it. One thing I will tell you, Durant; I will go to Vienna. I don't think it's too late; five months is not long enough at my age to put a man out altogether, is it? But as for Nancy, I can't answer. If she will go with me home, if she will go with me to Vienna, I can't tell you. We must see her first. She is at her mother's—"

"You don't mean to say that she has left you, Arthur?"

"Oh no, no," he said; "that is rather too absurd, the most ridiculous idea. Come along, Durant, let us get out and stretch our legs. I have not had a real walk for ages. Of course, as it's Saturday you are going to stay till Monday? That is right, that is a true pleasure. She is at—her mother's," he added, changing the subject abruptly, and dropping his voice.

What did it mean? Durant could not tell. He had not disliked Nancy; though she had defied him too, it had been done in a way which did not offend the young man. He had admired her, even when she attacked himself personally; and he had been inclined to think as Arthur did, that she was a lily among those weeds. He had not been surprised at his friend's infatuation. He had thought her a beautiful high-spirited girl, full of a generous if over vehement disdain for the conventional judgment that made her appear an unfit wife for a man of worldly position superior to her

own. Her threat to give up her lover, and her counter decision to marry him disinherited, in order to show his friends how little she cared about his money, were fresh in his mind. And he had liked Nancy; though he had been formally on the other side as Lady Curtis's agent, he had never really been unfriendly; he remembered well his old difficulties when he had tried to persuade Arthur to relinquish his faith to this girl who trusted in him, and with what a sense of relief he had found that all his arguments were vain, and Arthur's honour and love invulnerable. He was mystified and perplexed, as well as grieved, by Arthur's painful pre-occupation now, not knowing what could have happened. They went out in the teeth of the March wind, which blew sharp and keen along the suburban roads.

"I have not had anything to call a walk for weeks," Arthur said, with a feverish look of eagerness, as they reached the fresh breadth of the common, with the green fields and country paths beyond. The hedgerows were bristling with buds,

the skies softly blue, where they could be seen through the masses of cloud that swept across the great vault overhead. The young man sped along like a loosened greyhound, and his friend, fresh from the confinement of town, had hard ado to follow him. He talked little as he went along. Was he walking so fast to escape some care that weighed upon him? If it was not for that there was no other motive, for the walk was without any object. Now and then he would break forth for a moment about this prospect which Durant had come to offer him. "It would be the best thing," he would say, "far the best thing. I must get rid of this one way or other." Then he would be silent, and after a mile or so say to himself again, "Yes, *this* will not do—I must go, it is plain. Going may be salvation." Durant did not know what irrepressible cares were plucking at his friend's skirts and compelling him to these resolutions; and he himself talked calmly of Oakley, of the desires of the family there, and the haste they were in to send him off upon his

mission, and all the anticipations of Arthur's return which they had already begun to entertain. At this Arthur did nothing but shake his head, "Will *she* consent?" he said once. Would Nancy consent? was that what he meant? Consent! what excuse could she have not to consent? They walked far, at a great pace, and Durant was almost worn out. He lagged behind his friend as he approached the house. It was still all dark, one faint gleam of firelight in the drawing-room contending feebly with the grey of the twilight, no one at the window looking out for them, no lamp lighted. "Has Mrs. Curtis returned?" Arthur asked of the maid, as they went on, and was answered No. They went into her part of the house, the white little drawing-room, where indeed there were no pretty signs of Nancy's presence, no work or books to mar the trimness of the place, but all the chairs set against the wall, and the fire flickering dimly in the grate. And the dinner hour came without any appearance of Nancy. Arthur got more and more agitated as the

time went on—and Durant more and more surprised.

"Is your wife dining out?" he said, when he found they were about to sit down at the table without her. Arthur made no distinct answer; he said after a while, as if he had then heard the question for the first time—"She is at her mother's." He did not change his dress before dinner, or show any recollection of the need of such preliminaries, but sat over the fire, vaguely replying now and then when his friend spoke to him, and starting at every sound.

"Shall you not wait for Mrs. Curtis?" Durant said, as Arthur took him into the little dining-room.

"She is at her mother's," was all Arthur replied. Altogether it was very mysterious, and Durant could not but feel that there was mischief in the air.

At last when the clock had struck ten, and there was no appearance of Nancy, Arthur sprang to his feet. "I must go and fetch her," he said, "this will never do—this will never do!" Durant took his

hat mechanically also, and they walked out without another word into the windy night. The sky looked widened and enlarged by the boisterous breeze which drove mass after mass of clouds across the blue, and across the face of the waning moon, which shone out at intervals only to be swallowed up again by those floating vapours. There was a certain hurry, and coldness, and agitation in the night. The way from Rose Villas into the lighted street of Underhayes was dark, and the alternations of gloom and light in the sky made the vision uncertain. Durant could see how anxiously his friend peered at all the figures they met on the darkling road; but Nancy was not on her way home. They went on in silence to the street which Durant remembered perfectly, and to the door, at which Arthur left him standing as he went in. He had stood there before, and heard the voices in the parlour when he came here first in search of Arthur; how strange to come here now in search of Arthur's runaway wife! for this was what it seemed to be now. He could

hear the silence which followed Arthur's entrance—a pause which was impressive from the confusion of voices that had been audible before. "I have come for Nancy," he heard him say.

Arthur had gone in without any question. He had left his friend at the door, neither thinking nor caring that some revelation might be made which it was better Durant should not hear. He steadied his own countenance not to look angry or anxious. "Are you ready?" he said, addressing his wife, "I did not think you meant to stay so long."

"You have not given yourself much trouble to look after me," said Nancy. "No, I am not ready. I don't mean to go."

"What does she mean?" he said with a tremble in his voice, turning to Mrs. Bates.

"Oh, Arthur, I don't know what she means. She is as hot-tempered and as contrary as possible. She takes up things quite wrong. You never meant to drive her away, did you? You had not thought of leaving her—tell her for heaven's sake! She will not listen to me."

There was no one in the parlour but Mrs. Bates and Sarah Jane. It was a night when the tax-collector was busy adding up one of his lists of defaulters, and it was the same party which had witnessed the dispute of the morning which was assembled now. That was one reason of the sudden quiet; the other was, the awe and horror that had come over the family at Nancy's obstinate resolution to stay at home, and return to her husband no more—a resolution which he had divined, and which had weighed on him for the whole day.

"I—leave her!" said Arthur, "what did I say that looked like leaving her? Nancy, come home. I have been very unhappy, not knowing why you stayed away from me, and now I have something to consult you about. Come home."

"I am at home," said Nancy, sullenly. "It is no use talking. I have taken my resolution. Go away, Arthur, as you said, I mean to stay here."

"What does she mean?" he cried in dismay.

"Oh! I mean what I say. You told

me you were going. You said I might come if I pleased. I—who hate strangers—I, after all the slights you've brought upon me! but that any how you were going. I've left for good and all. Mother can go and pack up the things, and dismiss the servants, and leave you free; but one word's enough to me, Arthur, you shall never have occasion to say another. I don't budge from here unless mother turns me out. And as soon as you please, you can go."

They all looked at each other—the others pale, Nancy red with excitement and passion.

"You don't mean this, Nancy," Arthur said. "You cannot mean, for a hasty word, to forsake me; it is not possible. A hasty word! how many have you said to me. Come—come, you are angry; but how little there is to be angry about! We have had more serious discussions before," he added with a faint smile, "and you have said much worse things to me."

"It does not matter what I said, but what you said. No, Arthur, you may put

up with whatever you like; but I won't put up with it," she said, in all the unreasonableness of passion. "You might think it didn't matter what I say; but I think it does matter what you say. No, I am not going back. You may talk till you're sick—it won't make any difference to me."

"Nancy! don't be such a fool," said Sarah Jane. "Why, only think how people will talk. Not six months married, and coming back home! And after all the fuss that was made about your marrying, and the grand catch we fancied it was. When you come to think of it you can't be such a fool."

"Nancy—Nancy, my dear, you're unreasonable! indeed you're unreasonable—when Arthur says he did not mean it."

"Nancy!" cried the young man, "why do you torment me like this—what have I done to you? You make my life a constant contention. We never have a quiet moment. Have I failed in love to you—have I not thought of you in everything?

You will drive me mad, I think. Have I ever neglected you, or injured you?"

"You said you would leave me," said Nancy, "that's enough, I told you at the time Oh! never a man in this world shall say that he has forsaken *me!* I am not one that will be forsaken. Go, Arthur, go where you please. I shall stay here."

"Nancy, Lewis Durant is at the door. He has brought a message of the greatest importance from Oakley."

"Lewis Durant!" she started to her feet with fresh impetuosity, "that was all that was wanted. Do you think I will stay behind to see Lewis Durant—to let him spy and tell my Lady. No, mamma, no! That's decided me. Good night to you all. You may do what you please—but here I'll stay."

And Nancy darted out of the midst of them, quick as thought, while they all stood stupefied, and rushed out of the room and upstairs, where, as they listened they heard her quick steps overhead thrilling through the little house, and the quick closing and locking of the door.

The shock affected the three in different ways. Sarah Jane began to cry. Mrs. Bates, trembling, went up to Arthur and caught him by the arm. This strange, terrible incident changed him from her son-in-law, with whom she was familiar, into her daughter's judge, before whom she trembled.

"Oh, Mr. Curtis, Mr. Curtis!" she said. "The girl's wild and out of her senses. Don't think too badly of her. It's like a madness. Oh, forgive her!" The mother was in too deadly earnest to be able for tears.

"What am I to do?" said Arthur, overcome, with a gasp as if for breath.

"Oh, my dear, my dear! Leave her; she is out of her senses, she is out of her senses, she is out of her mind! Leave her to me, and I'll bring her to you to-morrow to beg your pardon. I will, Arthur, if anything in this world can do it," Mrs. Bates said, clasping her hands.

"There is nothing else to be done," said Arthur. He was as pale as death. He seemed to get his breath with difficulty as

he stood there, struck with wonder, paralyzed with the sense of impotence in his mind, and the dire injury that had been done him. A friend may leave a friend, or even a child a parent; but when a wife, a six months' bride, leaves her husband even for a day, even in the house of her father, it is as if some horrible convulsion had happened which turns the world upside down. He said nothing more to anyone, but went out, and caught at Durant's arm to support him, and walked home under the flying clouds, through the stormy, agitated night. The night was like his mind, swept by wild thoughts, overclouded by profound glooms. He scarcely said anything to Durant, who seemed to divine all that happened, though nothing was said to him. It was well he was there. When they went back to the villa, the poor little villa, which was at once so desolate and so meaningless without Nancy, the young man gave a heavy groan, which seemed to echo through the mean little rooms. Could anything change this fact, any coming back again, any penitemce?

His wife had forsaken him. Nancy had gone back to her mother's. It might be only for a night, but could anything change the fact? His life had come to a stop; no making up could alter that. As he had been even this morning, he could never be again any more.

It was Durant who told that little falsehood to the servants about why their mistress stayed away. She was not well, he said, and they need not wait up, as it was doubtful whether she would come home. And he stayed by Arthur through the long dull hours, hearing in breaks and snatches something of the story which poor Arthur felt was now over: how they had lived together, and how, according to all he could tell, they had parted. When the flood-tides were opened, it relieved Arthur to speak. He showed his friend in his despair all that was in his heart, his love for Nancy, which was ready to forgive everything, and yet the wounds which she had given to him.

"It is not her fault," he said. "It is the want of training. She has never

realised it, what she married for. She thinks it was only to be happy, to be loved and flattered, to have everything happy round her." This the poor young fellow said as if it was the best excuse in the world. "That is how she has been brought up. It is not her fault. She has not considered me, nor that there is a duty; and was I to be the one to remind her of her duty, Durant? I did not want her to love me because it was her duty. I wanted her to do her duty because of her love," said Arthur, unconsciously antithetical. Durant listened to everything, and made few comments. If he said anything in sympathy for his friend which meant condemnation of Nancy, Arthur rose up and stopped him. "How can you tell how she was aggravated?" he said. It was not till the middle of the night that Durant could persuade him to go to bed; and by that time the desolateness of the dreary little house without Nancy, which had no soul or meaning but Nancy, struck Lewis almost as much as it did Arthur. Poor little miserable shell of a place, which had outgrown its sense and its use!

Next day was a busy but a miserable day. Durant was at the Bates' little house as soon as it was opened in the morning, hoping that his eloquence might be more effectual than that of the poor young husband, and that he might be able, through her mother, to induce Nancy to come back. He found Mrs. Bates very anxious and tearful, very well disposed, but powerless. He gave her a hint of the proposal he had brought from Oakley, and of the unconditional surrender of the Curtises, which the mother carried to her daughter upstairs, but without any favourable issue. Later he came back with Arthur. Nancy kept upstairs, she would not show—and all the household was against her.

"I never held with it," said the tax-collector. "I told my wife so from the first. I never hold with a young woman complaining of her husband. Mrs. Bates is too kind a mother, that's what it is."

These things penetrated into Arthur's heart almost unawares; that his wife had complained of him all through; that there

had been talk of the advantages of the marriage, and that Nancy had hoped to be well off, and to make a great match, and had married him with that view. All these things sank into his heart. Was this true, or was it all the truth? It cannot be said that he believed it, yet it acted upon him as if he had believed, bringing a mingled pain and bitterness, against which at this moment he was incapable of struggling. All that day long they kept coming and going, pleading with her to return; but when another night came, and the slow hours dragged through with the same excitements as before—without her, or hope of her—all sense of possible renewal died out of these hasty young hearts, and the severance seemed complete.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

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